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TOWARDS NEW HORIZONS

THE WINGLESS VICTORY

THE SLEEPING PARTNER

THE EYES OF THE BLIND

WORLDS APART

ETC.



# Between the Old World and the New

*BEING STUDIES IN LITERARY PERSONALITY  
FROM GOETHE AND BALZAC TO  
ANATOLE FRANCE AND  
THOMAS HARDY*

BY

M. P. WILLCOCKS

LONDON : GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.  
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C. 1

*First published in 1925*

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## PREFACE

### A QUESTION OF TEMPERAMENT

THREE figures, the circle, the spiral and the line, would be enough to show the various forms of belief which man has conceived as to his history and destiny. For either he is going round and round from savagery to civilisation and back again to savagery, as is conceived by the discoverer of *Penguin Island*, or he is moving upward in ages that are but repetitions on a higher level of older and simpler forms of life, or he is advancing onward in stages that can best be shown by lines, though these may be straight or curved according to individual fancy.

Man is, then, a recurring decimal or a traveller moving towards a goal. But, notwithstanding all that philosophers have written to prove either the Great Return or the Moving Caravan, each man actually votes for the one or the other according to temperament, and not because his reason is convinced. Each of us is born, not simply a little Liberal or a little Conservative, but a Great Returner or a Caravaner, and the opinions we form are decided, in the main, by this temperament of ours. So that, whenever we discuss matters seriously with anyone, we ought first to ascertain whether he believes in repetition or in progress, whether he casts in his lot with Anatole France or with the seers who have talked of the goal as Heaven, as the Kingdom of God or as Nirvana, and who have told us, among other things, that it does not yet appear what we shall be.

The writer of these pages, then, believes instinctively that the human race is moving from unknown starting-point to unimaginable goal, to a goal as distant as the point at infinity where parallel straight lines meet; as distant and

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as unrealisable to minds still conditioned by our present form of consciousness.

As to the method of this advance, it is perhaps best represented by the spiral figure. For in watching the long sweep of history it seems hard to avoid the notion that certain periods are but repetitions on a new plane of events through which mankind had already passed on another. Yet, if man recurs, it is but, it would seem, only in order that he may pick up the stitches he has dropped.

I desire to express my special indebtedness to Mr. Middleton Murry for his *Dostoevsky*; to Mr. G. K. Chesterton for his books on *Charles Dickens* and *Robert Browning*; to Mr. Ellis Roberts for his articles on *Ibsen*; to Mr. Aylmer Maude, to Maxim Gorki and to Dmitri Merejkowski for their Tolstoi studies; to Mr. Festing Jones for his *Life of Samuel Butler*; to Mr. Edward Carpenter for his writings on *Walt Whitman*; to Mr. Lewis May for his *Life of Anatole France*; to Dr. F. A. Hedgcock for his *Thomas Hardy*; and to M. Maurois for his *Ariel*.

M. P. WILLCOCKS.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE. A QUESTION OF TEMPERAMENT . . . . .	5

## PART I

### PERSONALITY

#### CHAPTER

I. PERSONALITY THROUGH THE AGES . . . . .	11
II. PERSONALITY IN TWO MODES: VICTORIAN AND MODERN . . . . .	16
III. PERSONALITY AS REFLECTED IN LITERATURE . . . . .	23

## PART II

### THREE PROPHETS OF THE WILL

I. GOETHE AND THE WORLD-WILL . . . . .	33
II. BALZAC AND PERSONAL WILL . . . . .	50
III. SHELLEY AND THE WILL TO REBEL . . . . .	62

## PART III

### THE VICTORIAN MIND: THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

I. CARLYLE . . . . .	79
II. GEORGE ELIOT . . . . .	93
III. THACKERAY . . . . .	103
IV. TROLLOPE . . . . .	117
V. DICKENS . . . . .	128
VI. TENNYSON . . . . .	141

# 8 BETWEEN THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW

## PART IV

### THOSE WHO ESCAPED

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. CHARLOTTE AND EMILY BRONTË . . . . .	157
II. BROWNING . . . . .	169
III. MEREDITH . . . . .	184

## PART V

### THE WRECKERS

I. IBSEN . . . . .	201
II. TOLSTOI . . . . .	216
III. TURGENEV . . . . .	233
IV. TCHEHOV . . . . .	248
V. ANATOLE FRANCE . . . . .	258

## PART VI

### THE BUILDERS

I. SAMUEL BUTLER . . . . .	277
II. DOSTOEVSKY . . . . .	294
III. WALT WHITMAN AND EDWARD CARPENTER . . . . .	315
IV. THOMAS HARDY . . . . .	331
CONCLUSION . . . . .	353
INDEX . . . . .	363



*PART I*  
**PERSONALITY**

CHAPTER I.—PERSONALITY THROUGH THE AGES

CHAPTER II.—PERSONALITY IN TWO MODES: VICTORIAN  
AND MODERN

CHAPTER III.—PERSONALITY AS REFLECTED IN LITERATURE





## CHAPTER I

### PERSONALITY THROUGH THE AGES

SAYS old Yeroshka in *The Cossacks*, " You die, and the grass grows: that is all that's real." The first ages of human existence are spent in learning the rhythm of life and death in the cycle of Nature. In this time magic rituals are used to placate the powers which weave the garment of life. But behind these forces, as of the sun or the lightning-flash, can be felt a sense of inevitability as the deepest fact of all. Night follows day, death follows life, life springs from seed, all within the wheel which turns for ever whatever may be the magic which we use.

Even now to the native of the Congo this rhythm of being expresses itself in seven dramatic changes of season. The year starts with four days of thunderstorm, and the element that pierces to the nerves in this period is the sacred fire. From this man learns Fear. Next comes the time of water-spouts and whirlpools, and water brings the idea of purity till in the end the fire of heaven and the water of earth stand as symbols of fatherhood and motherhood. The third season brings the burning of the grass with new life springing from the burnt places. The motive idea is that of the rise of life out of death. In the fourth season, when the rainbows appear, the men return from hunting, marry, and sow seed. Vitalisation is here the principle. The season of harvest is followed by storms and swaying trees, with the falling of fruit. It is, too, the time of travail that ends once more in the four days of thunderstorm. The wheel has turned one circle and begun another.

Here are coming and going, life and death. Man and animal, plant and tree, are equally ephemeral, equally eternal.

## 12 BETWEEN THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW

Whatever the power may be that calls this cycle into being, it is recurrent and irresistible. Yet, bursting through this idea of irresistible might there persists, even in such crude thought as this, the idea of will. For at the end of a trial a West African will often exhort his chief to "keep the seven well in hand"; that is, to pass sentence in accordance with the seven laws of power, the seven seasons of the year. Under certain circumstances, therefore, man's self-will is regarded as capable of breaking through the sevenfold circle of necessity.

Such was probably humanity's feeling during the period of the nature faiths. Man was scarcely differentiated from man by the idea of distinct personality. As an individual he had yet to experience loneliness, separation and sin. He had still to explore on many roads the conception of personal will as distinct from the idea of the great will which turns the wheel of life. He had still to wander in the wilderness. In this search for himself he is led by two types of guides: first, by idealised type-forms such as those of the Greek gods, beings built by the effort of the intellect to serve as moulds into which human character might pour itself, and second, by the saviours, or spiritual reconcilers—Christ, Gautama, Laotze and Mahomet—beings cast up by life itself. In each of these master figures there was held up to man's view, as in a great shadow-play, the form of a complex personality. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me," is an exact statement of what happens when the eyes of the multitude are caught by the challenge of a creative personality. The phrase describes the process of magnetisation in the realm of character.

Thus arise the forms taken by the great religions as well as the special characteristics of national genius.

This second period of human history, that of the canalisation of character, merges slowly into the age when true individualisation is beginning. In this epoch, the early features of which begin to show themselves in the Renaissance and come to their height during the Industrial Revolution, men concentrate their gaze on a goal to be reached. Instead of lifting their eyes to a spiritual master, so that they may fashion their lives according to his inspiration, they level

their gaze forward to a common purpose which yet assumes as many forms as there are men who live to serve it. In this conflict of purpose human personalities start out as shapes in the round, vivid, provocative, startling, as compared with the more fluid natures produced when the life-stream flowed through Greek god or Eastern Saviour. Monotones in spiritual colour give place to the chaotic strife of high lights.

The second stage of history, then, is the age of gods and saviours who act as patterns for the young humanity ; their part in the third stage, as leaders, is played by the artist and the man of action, the former incarnating the purpose in idealised form, the latter expressing it in the myriad shapes it takes when put into common practice.

In this process not only are purposes achieved and men shaped into personalities, but all life except that of man is thrust out of the human consciousness. The framework of Nature that in the first age was the be-all and end-all of man's senses recedes in this third stage to a remote distance ; the procession of life, with all its powers, both seen and unseen, is narrowed simply to Man and Man's doings. Thus the proud spirit of Leonardo da Vinci, when it studies snakes, spiders and strange faces, does it all so that the spirit of life may be made to yield up its secrets to a man. "Man the master" : it is from this angle that he approaches existence. In his *Adoration of the Magi* it is not the Child Saviour, but the perfected form of humanity round which are gathered all the nations of the earth, as well as all the beasts. To Michael Angelo the human form alone is all that he needs with which to create a Heaven or a Hell, just as to Shakespeare all the mystery of that unreadable Destiny which carried men and gods along with it in the Greek Drama has become solely an affair of man's personality. A Shakespearian character may exclaim, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends," but the true divinity of the Elizabethans walked the stage of life as man ; man the individual, each one a world varied, complex and full-fraught with power to curse or bless.

But this view of each separate man as a world in himself leads life imperceptibly, but surely, towards the Industrial



Revolution. Europe lived in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through its pursuit of individuality as expressed in art and thought. Then followed expression in action; that is, the claim of the individual to use everything he can lay hands on to serve his own purposes: his will now is set to carve his name, his personality, on the history of the world. The whole of life in Western Europe comes in the nineteenth century to be an expression of warring personalities, each one separate and distinct from its neighbours, each one a world apart. The process reaches its supreme point in Victorian England and is expressed more clearly perhaps in the literature of the Victorian time than anywhere else.

In Conrad's sketch *Karain* a contrast is drawn between the consciousness of a crowd in the Strand, each individual of which elbows his way onward blind and deaf to everything except his own purpose, and the mental life of the Malay, in which each event as it comes serves as the opening of a new avenue of consciousness, until what to the European seems illusion has become to the Malay the entire content of his conscious life. To the European, life is focused to a point of consciousness; in the mind of the Malay, life and feeling spread mist-like over ever-widening fields.

When this Western habit of concentrated purpose had reached its height, men were confident because they had hypnotised themselves into forgetting complexity by gazing fixedly at a single point. Seeing one thing above all others, they moved forward unwaveringly towards it. Under the impetus given to effort by the first intoxicating vision of man's power over Nature, the thing that they saw was a fine material civilisation. For big-scale production would, it was believed, not only call into being a great and rich race, but would also create great and powerful personalities. The prize to be gained was character as well as wealth, and the scheme of existence was as beneficent as it was simple. Let each man be diligent in serving his own fortune, for by so doing he would make his nature great and the world rich. One god had come to earth in the form of a steam-engine and the arrival of other deities was confidently

expected. There was but one rule for all men ; it was—" one must cultivate one's own garden." For endless blessings were supposed to attend this cultivation, blessings both private as well as public, since personalities grow in strength and complexity by the very same means that lead the nations into material prosperity.

## CHAPTER II

### PERSONALITY IN TWO MODES: VICTORIAN AND MODERN

IF we glance back at past centuries we usually find ourselves thinking of them in the shape of the personalities who lived in them. Thus the eighteenth century may be typified for one person by the vision of Hannah More teaching the Ten Commandments to the Mendip miners, to another by the sight of Pitt weathering the storm of war, but in either case it is to the lighted figure of a personality that the gaze is attracted. Nor is this tendency to think in persons confined only to our superficial ideas, for the outstanding fact about Christianity itself is simply that Europe took the abstract religious conceptions of the East and built them up into the challenging form of a great personality. Every age varies in its vision of the Christ, but always the Western world has kept before it as the deepest expression of its faith, not virtues simply, but an individual through whom all virtues speak. To the typical man of the West it is as natural to think in terms of personality as it is to realise form by lines and angles.

Out of all the personalities who come before us on the stage of history it is the Victorians who are surest of themselves. They produce an extraordinary sense of well-defined boundaries and of perfect confidence, not only in "things as they are," but even in their own knowledge of these things. When confronted with the fact of a friend's death, pious old ladies of Victorian habit complacently sum up the matter in the words "our loss, their gain." Neither corruption nor the vanishing of an entity has any power to trouble them, for have they not drunk of the stream of question and answer in some *Child's Guide to Knowledge*? Between their minds and the enveloping mystery of existence there has been inserted a



non-conducting medium. It was the same confidence, the same lack of questioning, that got Victoria and Albert out of bed before daylight in order to deal cheerfully with the waves of wealth and power that were depositing the strata of the new social order. They had no doubt about the wealth and the blessing it was to bring.

Mentally the habitat of the Victorian age was a parlour cosily defended from the winds of doubt by sandbags on the window-ledges. And, since this existence of ours had been brought to so happy a pass by the stream of circumstance, it seemed wise and natural to trust to the same power all the unexplored regions of life. Hence it was regarded as ill-bred to inquire too closely into the sources of a man's wealth.

One result of this Victorian confidence is seen most markedly in the realm of personality. As the Age of Reason, or the eighteenth century, develops into the Age of Science, or the nineteenth, the type of character that is evolved shows a growing effect of finish. In literature the creative artists of the time draw their characters, like the figures in stained glass, with leaded lines, as it were, all round them, while in action men in the flesh moved to clearly defined ends like people who can calculate to a nicety the boundaries which hem them in. These people, in life and in literature, behave as though they were steel filings moved by a magnet. And the "thus far and no farther" of the age's prejudice is as binding on a Gladstone as on the smallest of Trollope's parsons.

Small or great, fictitious or real, the personalities of the nineteenth century live and move within the plane of reason. For the Victorian barriers of idea were as rigid as the corsets of their women, and it was the fashion to draw lines of division in all directions: mad men were cut off by a high wall of difference from sane men; wicked men could easily be distinguished from good ones; only by a mighty effort could a man scale the wall of class distinction, for the flesh and blood of gentry was different in quality from that of the common man. Finally, life was so separate from death that it was considered blasphemous to try to realise the nature of existence beyond the grave. The barriers were built as high as prison walls between the various orders of beings, the various

stages of existence. Men as well as women "knew their place."

This isolation of the man, the class, the type, led naturally, not merely to the growth of personalities of marked character, but to the development of form in the social and political structure. Nationalities grew into empires, and everywhere elaborate class distinctions were built up. The nineteenth century was, in one way, an age of faith, but of faith in the power of human order. And judged by achievement, that faith was justified. The age bred men of great force and called into life huge populations of fairly comfortable people.

The whole of this achievement, based on the theory that men could be classified like a set of Chinese boxes, rested on the instinctive idea that man's personality depends upon his faculty of reason. Man reasoned, and reason it was that made him a man. He was therefore *sui generis*, for not only were other animals devoid of reason, but also all that men did was due to thought. Sometimes, of course, the thinking was defective, yet the basis of human action was still thought, even though that thought might be "wrong"; that is, not according to the rules generally recognised by the human mind.

This conception of personality naturally followed from the general trend of purpose during the period. Man was elated by his first sight of the possibilities of material mastery. His weapon in this victorious fight was reason, thought. By reason he was creating fresh channels in which new life could flow. His eyes thus fixed on a goal that he conceived as amazingly splendid, he forged ahead, looking neither to right nor left, but ignoring, like the crowd in the Strand, the mysterious sea of being in which he is actually merged, the mysterious worlds of consciousness that actually meet in his organism.

The zest of this new vision of conquest was first enjoyed in England, the pioneer in the race for material mastery. It is, therefore, in Victorian England that the age of possession lives through its spring-time. And against the background of industrialism that now seems to us so sordid there shines the fiery spirituality of a Browning, the honesty of a Carlyle, the loving-kindness of a Dickens, the pity of a George Eliot. It

seems probable, indeed, that a system based on ingenuous self-seeking for the highest purposes suited the genius of the English people far better than any finer theory.

It is unlikely that England will ever again reach the greatness she touched in the nineteenth century, for the world is now concerned with foundations and with ultimate purposes. But the genius of the English race is purely pragmatic. Does a system work? That is all the Englishman asks. If the machine rattles and grinds, he is ready with a bottle of oil, but he never sits down to draw a design of a new machine; he seldom even permits himself to visualise the structure of the old one. At the opening of the nineteenth century it was a Frenchman who painted, not only the hell of those who go bankrupt in an age of possession, but the curse that wealth carries with it. And this Balzac did at the very dawn of the era and long before Tennyson, looking over industrial England, sang complacently of the divine event towards which life was progressing. For there is this difference between Balzac and his Victorian successors, that, while they believed that the system of individualist production could be so improved that all might enjoy its blessings, Balzac's instinct warned him that the trail of humanity's progress along this line must always be marked by the bones of those who have fallen by the way.

In every direction the accent of the nineteenth century was on form: in politics it developed nationalism and laid the foundation of empires; in literature it drew characters in the round that start out vividly from their background and owe nothing to the art of the bas-relief; in science it was the age that told the story of species-creation. But in our own century all this is in process of change, and already the stress is being laid, not on form, but on consciousness. The newest branch of science to-day is psychology, where the most significant work is being done with the records of the submerged memory. Even in physical science it is the living creature, rather than the dead body of it, that is the object of study. In politics the most vital question is "What do the people desire?" rather than "What frontier line will be strategic?" For self-determination is nothing more than consciousness in the racial, or the class, mode. To the generation that is



coming, consciousness will be all in all. And already the present generation scarcely pays lip-service to duty, depending for guidance almost entirely on sensitiveness.

But to a century which, like the nineteenth, turned its attention especially towards forms and the laws that produce them, it was natural that consciousness should have seemed a simple thing. A certain kind of consciousness went with the human form; another, presumably, with the animal. And that was the end of the business. The first Darwinians neither concerned themselves with the question of how consciousness is connected with form, nor with the subtleties of sensation in man and animal. Their heads being turned in one direction, they naturally saw in that direction only. And what they saw with unsurpassed clearness was a being moving on the lighted stage: having shown how he got there, they were but little concerned to know what influences reacted on him from the wings, or what memory he carried with him of his passage through those wings to the stage.

Everything in our attitude is now changed. Man is, to our thinking, not merely what the ages of evolution have made him: he is still all that ever he was. Nothing has been actually left behind, though all is, as it always has been, in process of transformation. To the Victorian it was a case of letting the ape and tiger die: man moved—so it was thought—upward, working out the beast. We seem, instead, to have to carry the beast with us all the way, and not the beast alone, but the cell, and possibly with it the very consciousness of forms of life that are inconceivably remote. "Humanity has struck its tents, it is on the march"; at any rate, it is outside its walled Victorian garden. One after another the barriers of separation between each order of being and the next are falling, and life, now faced from the standpoint of consciousness rather than of form, is beginning to show itself as a seamless garment.

The original impulse to this process of change, at least as far as formal thought is concerned, was given, of course, by the publication in 1871 of Darwin's *Descent of Man*. What that book attempted to prove was that there has been continuing from the dawn of creation one incessant process of unfolding in the realm of consciousness, as well as in that of form, and

that man's consciousness is a continuation of the simple consciousness of the animal from which, in fact, it has never been separated in the sense of being cut off. This barrier once fallen, the barrier of idea which separated man's reason from the consciousness of the animal world, all smaller conceptions of separation must needs vanish in time, as a mist that fades before the sunlight. Each individual possesses not merely personal, but also racial, memory and consciousness. He carries with him the result of the processes of animal experience and consciousness, together with the new elements of both that have been added by the ages of human life and by the years of his own personal life. It is in this vast sea of past impressions that move the archetypal ideas which man has incarnated in his mythologies, in his taboos, and in his ideals.

U To-day we feel that on the narrow thread of individual consciousness is built the sense of our own personality. On the same narrow thread depends our realisation of our fellows. We feel something like this personality in animals; even in different parts of the earth. In Sussex I am, or imagine myself to be, clear, clean, cold—Saxon. In Cornwall I am another being for the time, and fancy myself in contact with a mood of earth of a different temper altogether. There is for us to-day a personality of breed and type, of family, class and nationality, a personality that seems to depend on climate and even on the shape of the earth, on wind-pressure and on colour. The zest of life is largely derived from these variations in the stimulus of personality.

Yet to trust to these perceptions of personality is as venture-some as to cross Niagara on a tight-rope, though we do it every day. We must; since every word spoken, every act done, is a trusting to personality of some kind. And personality may be changed, for the time, by a thousand incalculable circumstances, by a new quality in the blood, or by the coming of spring. In any case, all that any personality does, at a given moment, is to swim on an unplumbed sea of consciousness. What we are to-day we may fairly guess, but if we choose to walk down one avenue of circumstance rather than another, who can tell what we may become? And which element of us it is that chooses the avenue none can say. At certain moments of vision we realise the truth about personality, our

own and that of others—that no arithmetic can calculate the protean shapes it may assume. The stock-broker has somewhere in him that ancestor of his who built an altar to earth, or slaved in the sun under the whip-lash. There are no certain barriers that will for ever keep separate the many mansions of the world within us; and Nietzsche's command, "Become what thou art," is in this aspect the most terrific invocation ever made to the unseen powers.



### CHAPTER III

## PERSONALITY AS REFLECTED IN LITERATURE

IT is impossible to grasp the true inspiration of any great creator of personality unless we know from what standpoint he painted his pictures. For the spirit of a man's vision of other men is decided by his instinctive idea of their origins, by whether he regards them as automatic results, or sees them as the instruments of a living purpose. Thus Tchegov assured that "there's no making out anything in this life" therefore his characters drift across his stage, moving with no particular starting-point and reaching no definite end. Tennyson, again, lived bound within the framework of the scientific law of his day; his people then walk the earth in mental strait-jackets. Both to Balzac and to Goethe life came under the guise of an expression of will. Yet Balzac's Will to Power was seen as serving personal ends, but to Goethe the Will came in the form of a divine artist who for ever expresses himself through the multiform shapes of life.

But the artist's view of life must needs be mainly determined by the theory of existence which prevailed among the men of his time. As the ages pass from the period when human personality existed only in germ, and the law of existence seemed to be little more than an ever-turning wheel of death and re-birth, to the age of the Will to defy, to separate, human artistry creates the Eden myth and the Promethean legend. As the spiritual faiths appear, emerging out of this chaos, thousands of men work together to create by loving thought the beautiful figures that express these faiths. In the third period, ushered in by the Renaissance and culminating in the Industrial Revolution, it is by vivid, individualised "characters," by thousands of highly differentiated

personalities, that the artist works. For during this time a double process of thought is in action: with science the process of life's unfolding is felt as an affair of law and even of a law that could be foretold by an intellect which could fully estimate

This law is the "necessity" of primitive man and its law is that of the strife of the jungle. The being whom this law had thrown to the top was separated, individualised, who used as his most powerful weapon war, especially in the realm of commerce. But if a bale of machine-woven stuff was the foundation of the bridge between what has been and what shall be, it is the strength of the man who can stand alone that supplies the girders to all possible bridges of this kind. And therefore the only magic left was that of the strong man. Before him principalities and powers, both seen and unseen, have vanished into the night of time.

The whole of the Victorian creative work of the typical masters is coloured by this view. The strong man and the process by which he became strong; the weak man and how he was broken; mastery of character the prize of struggle: these are the topics of the Victorian novels and plays. There is one subject which runs through all the studies of personality in this period. It is best described as "going through the mill." Those who emerge from this process are the clear-cut, forceful types whom we associate with the great English writers of the nineteenth century. Even when the struggle described is for the attainment of nobility, as in Tennyson's *Arthur*, the nobility is that of a master who has proved himself to be morally a conqueror. Both the creators and the created in this Victorian age pay lip-service to a reconciling Saviour, but His gospel is never allowed to upset the social order which has arisen out of that jungle-strife. It is evident, indeed, that most of the Victorians found the Christ an awkward figure to deal with. Thackeray tries to solve the difficulty by sentimental appeals to chivalry and devotion, but Carlyle openly prefers Odin and his good sword and, like the honest man he was, does not scruple to say so. And as far as organised Christianity is concerned, Trollope's Archdeacon sums up the situation very fairly.

There were, however, other imaginative creators of personality in this age, whose view of life and its expression was very

different from that of the English Victorians. A glance at the story of modern literature, starting with Goethe in the eighteenth century, shows another conception still persisting beneath the certainties of the Victorian age, and beneath its deification of the strong man as the be-all and end-all of life's unfolding. The World Will of Goethe's thought weaves the garment of life by some law that comes from within, some law that is the mysterious expression of its inner being and hence is incalculable by mere human reason. Humanity itself, indeed, is but one of the many means by which it speaks. Running like a subterranean river beneath the decisive mental assumptions of the Age of Science and Industry, there persists this idea of the creative, not the manufacturing, Will. The essence of this Will is its artistry : that is, at least, as Goethe sees it. It works by mysterious means ; its ways cannot be understood except by a being as mysterious as itself. This Master Artist, Life, as Goethe conceived it, worked in plant and animal, in the elements, in form and colour. The mark of all such work is, to the pure reason, strangeness, even lawlessness, and the Divine Imagination can never be read save by a divinely imaginative man, a man made actually in the divine image, in fact.

Stranger even than Goethe's case is that of the other early prophet of the Will, Balzac.

Throughout that extraordinary panorama of the first decades of the century of possession called the *Comédie Humaine* it is the Will to Power of the individual which inspires Balzac, yet nobody knew better than he the truth of the idea that man is not an independent intelligence, capable of attaining by a single effort to truth and virtue, but only an elemental force, of the same order as other forces, receiving from circumstances its degree and direction. Man is to Balzac truly an elemental force among many others, and the writer who described his own boyhood in *Louis Lambert*, who believed that he could reveal himself to his friends by a strange flickering of the candle-flame in a still room, was certainly not unaware of that sense of the unity of all life which is beginning so markedly to colour the consciousness of to-day. The supreme painter of that Will to possess which created the wealth, the empires and the personalities of the age of mass



production, in himself presents us with the spectacle of the battle between the nineteenth-century individualism, which sees the human calculating reason as the chief tool of creation, and that divination which senses the reality of a subtler man and a subtler universe than human reason can ever grasp.

This tide of thought, of belief in the Will, which comes most plainly to the surface in Goethe, produces in the mid-nineteenth century a band of artists, of destroyers, who lay the axe to the foundations of that order of society which the Victorians had built so proudly. Nothing is more extraordinary, perhaps, in the history of art than the appearance of this band of iconoclasts in the literary field, following as it does the publication of the *Origin of Species* in 1859. For if the practical man of that period wanted a justification for the theory of existence on which European Society was built he was accustomed to find it, philosophically speaking, in Darwin's principle of the beneficent results of the survival of the fittest. Yet, during the three decades which follow this supposed justification, the great European masters of creative personality are destroying with the corrosive acid of their irony, not merely the social state built up on the survival of the fittest, but the very types of character that had emerged from that state. These men were, in fact, wreckers of the old order of possessive society and along with it, of the type of man who found it satisfactory. For during the years which follow 1859 Tolstoi is publishing *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *The Power of Darkness* and *Resurrection*; Turgenev is giving to the world *Fathers and Sons*, *Smoke*, *Virgin Soil* and *A House of Gentlefolk*; Ibsen is challenging the self-satisfied with *Brand*, with *Peer Gynt*, with *Ghosts* and *Rosmersholm*, while with the *Karamazov Brothers*, with *Insulted and Injured*, with *The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky is revealing a new realm of the world within us.

The full meaning of this great period of the breaking of images will not be realised if we regard these destroyers as merely engaged in wrecking. They are far more than mere wreckers. For, while it is true that Tolstoi attacked the political state and the temper of the men who constructed it, that Ibsen proved the sexual pillars which upheld it to be rotten, that Turgenev dissolved into its element the character-



istics of civilised man, that Dostoevsky showed, by the creation of true Christs, the faked quality of all other ideals of Him, yet this was not the end of the matter.

These men were, in truth, seers, for at the back of their work is implicit a new view of the human personality. They even went so far as to create faint wraiths of the men and women who are to be when mankind has entered on a new order of consciousness, when it actually realises, not as an intellectual theory, but as an experience, the unity of life and being.

So evenly is the work of destruction of the past and the work of prophetic suggestion of the future divided in these iconoclasts, that it is often difficult to separate the one element from the other. Thus, the axe which appears in *The Doll's House* and in *Ghosts* is used again in *Rosmersholm*, but is there seen turning before our very eyes into the chisel of the sculptor, until finally we are left alone with the shape of the woman who is yet to be. Again, the tremendous will of a Bazarov is a foretaste of the time when our race shall know and actually use the powers it now only dimly guesses at. And are not the Christlike figures of Alyosha in *The Karamazov Brothers*, of the outcast woman in *Resurrection*, prophecies of another order of loving than any we sense to-day?

This group of believers in the power of life's creative artistry, these curiously transformed followers of Goethe and of Balzac, are the imaginative heralds of a world of consciousness that has yet to come into being on the plane of physical life, though the pathway by which it may come is already being laid by science. For already we enjoy in thought no ordered scheme of existence; we visualise the future as an uncharted ocean, instead of as the curriculum through which the Victorian schoolmaster felt sure he would work. Within the universe, as within ourselves, we feel the artist, not the calculator. We guess, at moments, that it is only the same great artist who is expressing himself alike in the world of Nature and of man; for, where we once saw nothing but separation, divergence and difference, we are beginning to see similarity and even the foundations of a profound unity.

This change from the cast-iron theory of personality to the fluidic has inevitably brought with it great changes in the method of dealing with personality in literature. For if we

can no longer draw leaded lines round our figures, either in the flesh or in art, we cannot tell with certainty where the boundaries of one character may be mingled with the outlines of another, or of many others. We cannot be sure that influences from the past, vibrations from what we name the future, do not form an integral part of our personality. We seem, at times of insight, to be swimming in a sea of consciousness. Therefore it is not vivid, clear-cut characters who stand out in modern literature, but rather groups of personalities, each group the expression of a temperament held in common. The great convases of the Victorian novel are gone ; men of many " humours " are displaced by sets of men all moved by one humour in differing modes.

But above all, the conception of the shape of human personality has changed. Instead of the simple upright form which was the Victorian idea of personality, we have now the perception of a being, upright indeed, but borne on two great wings, one of which links it with the animal world, the other with the formless regions of mind and spirit. A human being is thus a creature in whom no less than three planes intersect ; the subliminal region of the unconscious, or only partially conscious, where instinct reigns ; the lighted stage of thought and action which was all the world to the Victorian artist ; and the creative plane of mind and spirit in which the saint, the artist, and the thinker are alike at home. We are beginning, that is, actually to realise the underworld, the world, and the over-world, of personality. And the old dogmatism in literature has given way before the fluid sense of interacting realms of consciousness. As a ruling concept in the creative world, at any rate, pure form has gone ; it is lost in the ocean of consciousness, lost in the desire to express a vast incomprehensible unity. The main interest of the most typical creative work of later times lies in the under or over-worlds rather than in the world of action. Compare, for instance, in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* the retribution of the spirit suffered by Raskolnikov with the misery of a culprit who is striving to evade the law. In the Russian novel the whole drama takes place within the mind itself, but the detective tale deals simply with the several stages by which the noose is fitted to the neck.

In these two forms of story we are in contact with two

different worlds of consciousness, in one with the mental over-world and in the other with the lighted stage where acts are the things that count. But in Dostoevsky one can dimly discern yet another world beyond Raskolnikov's drama of the mind, a stranger world still where the passions of the mind give way to the passions of the soul itself. For in this transcendental world of pure consciousness infinite passions move of love and hate. It is here on this plane, if anywhere, that one may conceive the possible perception of that unity of all existence which many in our age are beginning passionately to desire to feel.

This new view of the triple nature of the human being took in Turgenev the form of a most delicate analysis of the essential human quality ; in Ibsen it appeared as an attempt to show on the stage man as the master builder of the bridges between instinct, act and creative thought ; in Tolstoi it appeared most notably in a startlingly powerful realisation of the world of the senses ; in Dostoevsky it lends itself to the exploration of the world of the spirit. In later days it is the same view of man that leads Hardy to set him in the framework of great Nature ; in Anatole France it brings into being a created world, born of earth, but not earthly : Plato's over-world begotten by the Cynic Muse. In Conrad it presents the created world of nature as a tapestry shot through with man's joys and pains. In him it is often hard to disentangle man from Nature and Nature from man.

Looked at in one light, the whole purpose of the ages has been to call into existence personalities of ever more and more complexity. But in the carrying out of this purpose the work of physical nature has been shaped and guided by the ideal figures created through the insight of great artists. Among the greatest of these are the writers who used their creative powers to give life to that conception of personality which sees man as a being of triple nature, as a creature upheld on the visible plane by his two invisible wings.

The Victorian artists gave a picture of a world that was passing away : these new men did something that was still more remarkable, for they created personalities on the mental plane that were prophecies of the men of flesh and blood of to-day and even of to-morrow.





*PART II*

THREE PROPHETS OF THE WILL

CHAPTER I.—GOETHE AND THE WORLD-WILL

CHAPTER II.—BALZAC AND PERSONAL WILL

CHAPTER III.—SHELLEY AND THE WILL TO REBEL



## CHAPTER I

### GOETHE AND THE WORLD-WILL

"I PROMISE you weariness, hardship, and battles. But we will conquer or die." This, the fighting slogan of Garibaldi, is the true lure of man who, being in essence a forward-looking being, dreads the cul-de-sac above all other ills. Some minds are, in fact, already anxious at the prospect of an establishment of the earthly Utopia. For, when every creature born is sure of joy, they ask; when war and poverty are no more, and good will is the law of life; when, in short, Jerusalem has been built in every corner of the globe: then, where will humanity find its occupation?

It is Goethe who answers this doubt, the Goethe of whom Matthew Arnold wrote:—

"He said: the end is everywhere,  
Art still has truth, take refuge there."

For all the sorrows of earth, including that last great misery, the curse of having no more worlds to conquer, there is but one conceivable remedy; that is, the creation of our own self-made realm, the world of art, of the imagination.

The key, at any rate, to any comprehension of Goethe's place in the hierarchy of genius is simply to feel that he realised, perhaps more fully than any other man has ever done, how many are the mansions of his own nature which await man's exploration and how true is the old mystical symbol of man as the microcosm of an apparently infinite universe. And therefore before the gateway of the new stage of human progress which was heralded by science there stands the enigmatic figure of the man with the beautiful face, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, "the last of the universal minds."

He was indeed so universal in the width of his interests

that it is hard to see him at all as a complete whole. His personality is like a shadowy Brocken shape which one can only catch if one stands afar off from it. In mere historical position he occupies the place of a hinge, for, born almost exactly in the middle of the eighteenth century, he published the Second Part of *Faust* in 1831, and died in 1832, the year of the English Reform Bill. He had lived through the cataclysm of political revolution; he had floated on the tide of eighteenth-century humanism, or the belief in the power of man's will; he himself had helped to bring near the day when the mind shall be able to grasp the great outlines of the tale of creation. As a prophet he appears to have foreshadowed the coming of a new consciousness in which man will sense the unity of existence. Or, if that is going too far, it can at least be said with truth that he felt that mental sense of unity which is beginning now to rise like a sun above the horizon of our age. In this respect he is like a man seeking in a dark room for what he cannot actually find, yet knows to be there. His eyes, at any rate, were turned in the right direction.

These things are true, yet it is also true that, as far as the English are concerned, he has never been a force in our intellectual life; never a recognised force, that is. Goethe as a thinker is considered by us as a great Has Been. His thought has been swallowed, digested, assimilated. European life, flowing in its myriad currents, has not realised how many of the channels it uses were first cut by Goethe. We have not read him, but we have unconsciously breathed his mental atmosphere. He is bigger than any professor and his essential spirit escapes from the library and the lecture-room to the free winds of Heaven. He was far more truly a man of the study than Tolstoi, yet he stands by the side of the Russian as one who changed the attitude of the common man towards life. Goethe, therefore, may be neglected as far as the reading of his books is concerned because what he lived through in himself was but a brief abstract of what the race itself has yet to experience. The life-blood of such men as Goethe and Tolstoi evaporates like a spiritual essence, to enrich the common air.

Even as an artist Goethe's position is a paradox, for,



although he was the artist *par excellence*, he made it hard for posterity to fit him anywhere into its temple of Fame. For the shrines in that place, especially the niches which are most visited, belong to the creators who left behind them something perfect, something finished. Yet few of Goethe's works, except his lyrics, give one the artistic satisfaction which comes from a thing cast in one mould. The history of his compositions shows that he was incapable of that single uprush of the creative fire which fuses the material, shapes the form and expresses the spirit of a conception in one sudden heating of the crucible. With him the idea of a work of art was not a toxin from which he must rid himself or die of the poison it set up in his system. Such was Ibsen's way; Goethe's was very different. He conceived a creation as a power and flung it into the air, but was not therefore truly freed from it. Again and again it returned like a demoniac possession to inhabit the soul of its creator. Mentally, it was hard for Goethe to cut the umbilical cord. Thus, when the individualism of the *Sturm und Drang* epoch caught the poet in its uprush, he created his first version of Faust as the man who took to himself eagle's wings and defied all the gods that are or may be; in his maturity Faust again seized on him, forcing him to give life to the spirit which expresses the Eternal Return of the human spirit from the depths to the heights, its incessant heliotropism, or bias towards the light. It was under this influence on his mind that Goethe wrote his *Iphigenia* and so altered destiny that he cured the age-long curse of the Oresteia by the mere beauty of a woman's good will. But the third re-birth of Faust, in Goethe's old age, takes his creator out and away, far above the eagle's flight of his youth or the sunlit heights of his middle age, into a region from which he can look down, not on human life alone, but on the whole universe of being. From this point he sees, not the human Heaven, Hell and Purgatory of mediævalism, but the journeying of the creative Will into manifestation and its return back to the formless realm. Goethe watches the scroll of memory unroll, the eternal record of all that has been and will be. Time and Space are gone till finally he sends his Faust down on that last journey towards the dread Mothers, of whom Mephistopheles says :—

" . . . Goddesses

August enthrone themselves in loneliness.

Place none around them, glimpse of Time still less.

They are—we speak not of them, scarce will think—

They are the Mothers."

And when asked of the road to them, he says :—

" The road ?

There's no road . . .

No locks are there—no bolts to be pushed back ;

But solitudes whirl round in endless eddy—

Canst grasp in thought what no words can express—

Vacuity and utter loneliness ? "

Finally, with that grim touch of strangeness that must surely mark the human with its peculiar sign-manual among all the hosts of created beings, Goethe shows that the Faust who dared to face the horror of Creation's depths could yet cheat a peasant of his rights and play the senile dotard on the edge of the grave. Greed and selfishness and hate : they still tear Faust's very soul till with a grisly chorus of mockery the hideous lemurs tumble him into his grave to rot. Yet from that obscene closure he rises into the company of the redeemed, taking the way that was unknown to Shakespeare's Hamlet.

There is nothing finished and perfect in the art of *Faust* ; nothing that can fill a niche in any walled place. For there are no boundaries in it at all ; its spirit flows like a wind through the tremendous vastness of infinity. Faust is Man and escapes through our hands.

By the irony of fate it is this artist who has for his chief biographer in English, G. H. Lewes, a neat-minded sort of a man whose science was concerned, as he himself tells us, not with function but with form ; a man to whom, in fact, the whole world of causation was a closed book. Lewes had then no idea at all, for all his painstaking care, of the plane of being on which Goethe actually lived. The urge of invisible will that is behind all nature was never Lewes's concern, though it was Goethe's.

If it was hard for Lewes to see Goethe, it is perhaps easier for us in the present century than at any period since Goethe's

birth in 1749. For we are beginning now to sense existence in somewhat the same way that Goethe felt it towards the end of his days. He was born at least a century earlier than the time to which his spirit belonged. But it is apt to be the fashion with very great men to anticipate the general incarnation of their spirit in this way, and so Goethe sums up the eighteenth century, lives through all the phases of the nineteenth century and throws forward his soul, his very essence, into the twentieth. As a thinker he turns his instinct towards the idea of an incessant evolving of physical life; as a spiritual being he senses afar off the craving for that realisation of unity which is the secret hunger of to-day; as an artist he tries to utter in a shadow-play what may have been in the divine darkness when it dreamt, and so called into being, the universe of created things. As a child it is the puppet-play of *Faust* that sounds with many voices in his ears: it is a dream-vision. Later on, as artist, he sees art itself as human dreaming, a counterpart in brief of the divine dreaming which calls into being whatever is. To him the Divine Imagination is the Alpha and Omega of life, and art no pastime of an idle hour, but the very essence of creation in all modes, human and divine. And Man is Faust, a being whose history on earth is one of lust and hate and greed; who can rob the helpless after knowing both heaven and hell and yet can find a way up to where the worlds are cast forth into being.

Nothing in the world of the mind is more surprising than the notions which at different times have been seized upon by men as "explanations" of existence. Metaphysics, theology, even mathematics, have been invoked in the effort to understand. Most minds appear to move in a world of pure surfaces and are three-dimensional even in dream. They move up, down or across, like creatures condemned to a perpetual glissade over polished surfaces. Temperamentally this was impossible to Goethe, who saw that even in the three-dimensional stage—as far as our physical consciousness is concerned—we must deal mentally with something besides height and length and breadth. In his own consciousness he seems to stand at the centre of a solid world from which he moves outward on an infinite number of radii, to an incalculably distant circumference. His world of sensation is a sphere and he has X-ray



sight. Therefore no science of lines and angles can satisfy him. Mathematics was, in fact, the science against which he broke his head, so that he cuts a queer figure when he disputes with Newton over optics. For no mere framework of a constructed universe will ever satisfy such a mind, since what it demands is the inner world and the lines of junction of this world, or worlds.

"Being" to this type of intelligence is not, as it is to most, an affair of cleavages, of gulfs and barriers, but of an inner fluidity and interpenetration in which not atoms alone, but realms of consciousness, tend to intermingle in one vast ocean. It is his sense of the eternal flux of existence, physical and material, as well as mental and spiritual, that makes Goethe so in unison with the spirit of to-day. He is at once most modern; and most ancient, for his instincts link him on the one hand with the mystics, ancient and modern, with Plotinus and Walt Whitman, and on the other, with the chemists and biologists of the twentieth century. For to these life is beginning to present itself as a great "flowing together" on the physical as well as on the mental plane. And although Goethe could not, of course, foresee how this intuitive knowledge of his would work out on all the departments of inquiry, yet as an artist, and when he is at his greatest, he finds to his intelligence no barriers anywhere. Therefore Faust ranges freely from the laboratory to the Augsburg cellar, from the prison cell to the heights of Heaven. All flows together in an ocean where there are tides and currents, storms and calms, but no impassable straits. The gulfs of Dante are unknown to Goethe.

There is a curious episode in Goethe's youth which is usually slurred over by his biographers: that is the winter spent by him over alchemy and kindred studies. Yet this is a very significant incident in the history of Goethe's inner life. For it is precisely the same impulse that drove him to turn from literature to science in his later days that sent him in his youth to study Paracelsus and Jacob Boëhme; and the man who found the intermaxillary bone in man, as well as in animal, who showed that all the organs of a plant are modifications of one fundamental type, was the same as he who looked, with Paracelsus, for the fifth element, the quintessence



of creation, and with Boëhme for the fundamental unity of all existence, both of God and man. For in all, in man and animal, in plant life, in the elements, and in the spirit, he sought the great unity. This temper of Goethe's soul is in tune with the hunger of St. Augustine, for Goethe, too, was restless till he rested in—"Thee"; but by "Thee" he meant a great summing up to which both biology and chemistry, as well as mysticism, must needs contribute. He wanted not the unity of man and God, not of body and soul, but of all the hosts of created and uncreated beings, of those that are and are yet to be. Goethe sought, then, illumination, and therefore, like Newton, he found himself among those who worked for strange things, such things as the transmutation of metals and the fifth, or essential element of life. These researches of his are commonly regarded as having been useful later on in helping him to write certain pages in *Faust*: they are supposed, in fact, to have provided him with suitable stage properties for hocus-pocus. Yet the fact that Paracelsus had something to tell him, and Boëhme a great deal, was nothing more or less than his sign-manual of suitability for the writing of a *Faust* that should really incarnate the great fight waged by the human race against the darkness.

The *Faust* legend, of course, long before the young Goethe heard its many voices murmuring in his soul, had proved its attraction for the multitude, especially in the two great Teutonic countries, Germany and England. It charmed; in the first place, because it magnified the sense of human power: it showed a man rising above fear and law. Thundering across the stage, Marlowe's *Faustus* is greater than his Tamburlaine, inasmuch as a man of subtilty is greater than any savage chief. This Will to Power flows like a subterranean river below all the Elizabethan stage from Marlowe to Webster. And power is what the students of magic sought in Nature; that same power which science has gained and industry has applied, for the most part damnably.

There is a coarser attraction in the Faust tale, of course: the fascination of feeling one's flesh creep. The mob dearly loves a smell of brimstone in every age. Besides, man is mentally lazy and is therefore only too willing to listen to anything that proves it to be wrong to think. And when

Faust vanishes in a "smeech" of hell-fire, it is delightful to think, if you are among the spectators, that you yourself can escape such a judgment by merely believing what your fathers believed. It is such an easy way of escaping hell to compound for the sins you are inclined to by—yet another sin. Among the mob there are sure to be many, also, who like to watch somebody else's daring; just as they like to see a man put his head inside the lion's mouth. Prometheus must have made the Greeks feel just like that.

Magic in itself has the charm of the short cut, which is exactly the quality that proves most attractive to the youthful mind. Magic sought power, just as science does, but imagined that this power could be got hold of by means of keys—sounds or formulæ—or perhaps by one great key that would unlock all doors. Mankind, still seeking power, had to spend centuries in learning that the longest way round is the shortest way home; and that the patient searching of facts comes first. Yet are we not already entering upon that almost boundless power over Nature of which the alchemists dreamt? And are there not still two magics, one black and one white? For black magic was merely power used for selfish ends; and white magic power used in service. And this is precisely the moral dilemma which faces science to-day. Power over Nature is, like all other kinds of power, still subject to the moral law. But the scientific magic so far used has been mostly black; and not only so in Germany.

Science on the exoteric side is the search for power just as it was in the day of the medicine man and the tribal magic. But on its esoteric side it is none other than the search for affinity of being, a groping after that proof of the unity of life which the soul, no less than the mind, does most eagerly desire. And to the rational, as to the intuitive, mind, there is no joy to equal that which comes from a flash of illumination, or of proof; when there is established some link of structure or of function in the tremendous chain of life and consciousness.

Here was the charm of magic and mysticism for the young Goethe; here was the lure of science for the middle-aged Goethe, the Goethe of plant morphology and the intermaxillary bone; here was the real root impulse of Goethe's whole being: his craving for the vision of unity. Here, too, was the supreme

task of Goethe, the artist : to bring together in one vision, or shadow-play, all the procession of life ; to show the temporal in terms of the eternal and to lead the realm of form up into that formless world where reigns the pure idea ; to show the intermingling planes of creation, and to do it through no creed, no formula. Unlike Milton or Dante, he has no mediæval cosmogony on which to plan his chart of the uncharted world ; he uses instead the crudest, most popular tale of bugaboo, simply because it is true to the heart of man.

In Goethe's vision the cosmogony, if we can use such a word, is almost Celtic. For we feel in it the Divine Darkness, the Nothingness that yet contains everything. And out of it arises the dreamer, the divine imagination, which gives birth to the world within and the world without. All life is dreaming : everything is dreamt into being ; and the true symbol of the divine creative power is the power of the artist. This is in absolute opposition to the current scientific view of the nineteenth century, in which everything is thought out, planned and foreordained. The creative fire, both in God and man, works, according to Goethe, not like a schoolmaster drawing up a Time Table, but by will, by the free, creative *élan*. Man works in the same way ; so does life itself. We cannot truly tell what we shall be ; nor can any creature tell, for we know not what our wills may decide to make us. The Life Force is an artist, not a mechanic. The imagery of the stage haunts Goethe's mind from his childhood to his death-bed. For the shadows of Truth that Plato's cave-men saw play in Goethe's symbol a puppet-show of which the Life Force is the great stage-manager.

And who does not feel, after all, that it is the players who make the success of the play, the success or failure of it, rough-hewn though it may be in outline ? Can they not turn it into a glory, or a mockery, according to their tempers, powers, and passions ? Artist-God expresses Himself by artist-man ; by artist-man incalculable in action as he is unimaginable in issue. There is here no cast-iron system of the jungle law, the survival of the fittest, by which nineteenth-century man damned himself and his posterity, condemning the future ages to the tyranny of cruelty. The road, in Goethe's thought, is left open to the free artist, Man. There is nothing shut



out from this view ; there can be no alien creatures. Nature herself has to come in and all the myriad forms thrown forth by her awful fecundity. The child who set up an altar to the Divine Being at seven years old and lit the fire, not by a match, but from the sun through the help of a burning-glass, was from the start a free creature who could not live by lighting tapers to the Jehovah of anything chosen or set apart ; nor could he turn his back on the forces of hidden Nature, even to fix his gaze on the tortured shape on a Cross.

Goethe is beyond creeds, because he is beyond the old fear of knowing too much on which organised religion has played in every age, waging war first on physical investigation as now on spiritual ; saying, "Thus far, and no farther," every time another door has been opened into the many-mansioned universe. Yet, if man is, as they say, made in the image of God, what greater blasphemy than this denial can there be ? For, either God works in the dark, turning His face aside so that He may not see His own acts or—He knows. Then, in the end, if He knows, so, too, must the being made, hypothetically, in His image.

You cannot have it both ways : if the Life Force knows, then so must the creature that—plays His play for Him. Tolstoi was excommunicated for trying to know : Goethe was not. Yet, of the two, it was Goethe who aimed the shrewder blow at this servile attitude towards the Church. It was not in Goethe to believe in human defeat, or in life's ; the being that, after ages of obstacle, had taken to itself eagle's wings must reach the summit at last. Goethe presents the figure here of a strong swimmer rising to meet wave after wave of cowardice, servility and fear. "The man against odds" is his picture even in the sentimentality of *Werther* ; in the forthright boldness of *Götz Von Berlichingen* ; even in the classic calm of *Iphigenia*. Baffled, man rises again, even though he is driven back here or there, and has to take other roads than those he could foresee. Goethe seems to see for man what Bergson saw of the Life Force itself : here a defeat, and there a victory ; progress dammed back in the armoured creature who plays for safety, reaching a blind alley in the cunning schemer, and freely passing through only where it is most



self-reliant because there it has played for everything but safety.

Goethe in yet another aspect is among the most modern of thinkers ; inasmuch as he sees in the procession of life, not man only, but many other orders of beings, from the butterflies that play above Faust's dreaming soul to the Earth Spirit and the baleful dog. The beasts are in his system as well as all the rout of Pagan forces, the sirens, Nereids, Tritons, Proteus and his crew.

“ . . . Aboriginal gods are they,  
Intuitions ; High Volitions ;  
Longings Unrelievable ;  
Sentimental Pangs of Hunger  
For the Inconceivable . . . ”

shadow-shapes, in fact, thrown out by the creative mind to express other lines of evolution that yet remain unmanifested, hidden in the Divine Darkness. Or are they orders of Nature that we cannot see ? Goethe seems to hesitate, for of his “ Pselli and Marsi,” creatures that appear riding on sea-bulls, sea-calves and rams, he says, putting the words in their lips :—

“ We, our gentle task pursuing,  
Care not what the world is doing.

Be it Cross, or be it Crescent,  
With alternate victory,  
For their battle-field incessant,  
Tears and triumphs, what care we ? ”

Man's field of contest may not be the only one, and the earlier, more primitive peoples and races seem to have been aware of other orders of beings, ranging from earth-forms to “ Principalities and Powers ” beyond all our dreaming.

Against such a conception as this the whole tide of thought has been flowing since the sixteenth century and imagination has been so concentrated on individual character, on the human personality, that man has become the great centre of all literary preoccupation. Elizabethan drama, losing itself in the vivid, masterful world of the individual character, lost sight entirely of the great unseen forces that move behind

the Greek stage. And so these powers of the invisible, together with the Nature powers, dropped below the horizon of human consciousness on the Elizabethan stage and on the great canvas of the Victorian fiction. For if Copernicus took the planet Earth out of the centre of the celestial sphere, Shakespeare promptly retaliated by putting man back into the middle of the terrestrial scheme. And the growing force of individualism has kept him there pretty consistently through more than three centuries. But Goethe in the two parts of *Faust* sees beings and powers of all orders and on every plane, even to the Homunculus, that manufactured Son of Man's ingenuity who cannot endure the sun's rays, but in his flight in search of freedom dies, sharing the fate of Icarus. In Goethe's thought there is no limit to the creative force either in man or god. We "are such stuff as dreams are made of," but our dreams give life.

Goethe, in fact, is no creator of character in the Elizabethan sense; his people are not people cut in high relief and gnarled and twisted each in individual fashion. The two beings that really live, now and always, in his pages are Faust and Mephistopheles, the two projections of the eternal duality of character. There is the critical, ironic, humorous, truth-telling and cynical side that irritates, galls and goads, through whom alone man has moved upward and by whose power it is probable that he alone will fully realise his whole nature. He it is that we dread and hate above all other creatures, whether we call him Mephistopheles or Samuel Butler. The second is the aspiring, sentimental, heroic and lying, the rising and falling creature, Faust, who is the object of our adoration, whom we worship when we are carried away by the "heroism" of war or the highfalutin of "sacrifice." Faust is a poor fellow; mean and horribly sentimental. Yet there he is: a god, too, by fits and starts, though often a poor tool, where Mephistopheles is consistent, strong, and clear-sighted. Incarnation, like poverty, makes strange bed-fellows. But it was in Jacob Boëhme that Goethe might first have found, and perhaps did find, these two spirits of aspiration and negation. It is by them, at least, that he explains the manifestation which we call creation.

In plain fact Goethe was not earth-bound enough to be a great creator of individual and vivid personalities; he refused

to be too deeply implicated in the undignified and often obscene adventures of this world. He refused to know pain, catching the habit from his delightful mother, that Frau Aja who made it her lifelong habit to "gulp down the devil without looking at him." She would not even be told of misfortune, and so her son fled from the very shadow of it, from the very possibility of annoyance, even in a love-affair that had passed beyond the spring-time of passion. There is no need to discuss precisely the amount of platonicism in his amours, but at a certain point in them he ran away from all the women, except one, that Christiane Vulpiene who made a homely nest for him at a time in his life when he had learned already to drive the two horses of soul and body without getting the reins entangled. But that is an art which youth takes a long time to learn. And therefore, up to that point, when this art was really mastered by him, Goethe acted consistently on the principle that—he who kisses and runs away, will live to kiss another day. He was, in fact, a sensitive, one of those who actually realise the parlous state in which a man lives; so that to draw a breath, to cross a road, to open a door, may bring down the disaster that hangs above us all by a cord no thicker than a spider's web. He therefore walked warily and as one who knows that there is no surer way of bringing down a shower-bath of misery on one than by a love-entanglement. Neither was it pain only that the poet in Goethe feared in the clasping arms of these women, for the very essence of his artist nature was to be in love with beauty absolute, to know that a woman can merely offer something which is, in Plato's words, at one time fair and at another time foul, for "the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is." Those "beauties of earth," Gretchen, Charlotte, Frederika, and the rest, were but stepping-stones, used as ruthlessly as the poet, the artist, uses all things when these can serve his tremendous purpose.



This great refusal to share the common life brings, however, like all things, its Nemesis. And this Goethe who would not drink the dregs, who ran crying from the meat-stalls and loathed the sight of an ugly baby, is not, and never can be, numbered among the company of those who are loved by their kind. He is not among the Beloved because no one can be that who has not gone down and shared the lot of the spirits in prison. The Christ, the Buddha, St. Francis, are those who suffered. They are loved.

Goethe's refusal also changed the character of his art; it is mainly responsible for the fact that most of his books are already dead and now look like mere flotsam and jetsam of the tide of time. Who, except a student, is likely to trouble now about the sorrows of Werther, the daring of Von Berli-chingen, or the classic exercise on the Iphigenia theme? These books are just literary "modes," with about as much life in them as there is in a fashion-plate of a past century. Even *Elective Affinities* is a literary theme, an experiment, and we write such exercises far better than Goethe could, for we live them first. Goethe withdrew into the over-world and common life escapes him.

But this withdrawal enabled him to write *Faust* in its two parts. He gathers himself gradually into the heights whence he can see first the passing of the ages as in a great shadow-show, can, finally, breathe for a moment that altitude of immortality where all things exist in a mighty and eternal *now*.

*Faust* is born of the restlessness that comes of having no nest of refuge in which to forget the eternities. This man, had he been able to give birth to a Falstaff, even to a Hamlet, had he known from personal exploration what is really in that many faceted creature, the human being, could not have realised the evolving man of the ages. Goethe, in this matter, is like an astronomer watching a star; its orbit, even its chemical structure, must needs be his business, but he cannot afford to be involved in the history of its inhabitants, or their personal careers. Literature shows us the absurd spectacle of De Quincey hurling at Goethe the charge that he played the charlatan in his old age in order to keep his name always before the public eye: it is as though De Quincey accused Mount Everest of putting on a snow-cap lest one



should forget its height. For when this was written of him, Goethe had long ago withdrawn into the lonely eminence of the starry heaven.

Yet, in one sense, a fisherman, a labourer, may know more of what it is to bear the burden of being a man than he did. He had refused the Way of Buddha, for—

“ The misery of this world  
If we do not heap it upon ourselves,  
Then,  
We may pass, without knowing,  
The Way of Buddha.”

He is a great master in the lonely mode, but he is not loved, not one of the Saviours who know no rest, who refuse to know it, while there is a single creature still in pain. And therefore his Gretchen is just youth ; she is not a real woman ; and her song, “ A King in Thule,” is just a haunting rhythm of all that men have hoped to find in love and beauty ; she is everyman’s desire and everyman’s memory, but she never thrills his pulses in the flesh. If we want that thrill in art we must turn to that passage in Tolstoi’s *Resurrection* where the ice cracked in the night. Goethe’s practice of gulping down the devils of this earth without seeing them made it for ever impossible for him to give us the real devil with his tail and stench of brimstone—and his lure. But to know this devil well, to sit cheek by jowl with him, is to create human beings, as persons, and not Othello only, but even Rosalind and Juliet. Goethe’s characters, therefore, smell, not of the lamp, but of the laboratory, since they are not flesh and blood, but essences. Even Dante himself is greater in Hell than anywhere else, and can at least convey to the senses the smell of singeing flesh. But Goethe’s Augsburg Cellar and Walpurgis Night are loathly only in the fantastic sense ; there is about them nothing of the true stench of Dostoevsky’s thieves’ kitchen, nor can he give us that breath of the divine which sometimes blows through the foetid air of the Karamazov household.

Most thinkers on life have a favourite symbol, or hieroglyph, by which they visualise for themselves the motive-power of existence. To one, it is the Word ; to another, the loom ; to the third, a mechanism. To Goethe, as to Plato, it was a play, a play of the shadows that mask reality. And so Goethe

himself looks down from his height on the beast-shadow that climbs out of the water and slime through the plains to the formless regions beyond the clouds.

It is all to him but one immortal hour, for he has withdrawn from the life of the senses, has gulped down all his devils according to his mother's formula ; gone are the women, gone is the Court at Weimar, with Germany itself and the turmoils of a feverous Europe. In the pure world of idea that he has gained Helen and Gretchen, Venus Urania and Venus Pandemos, are one, for there is in these regions no separate heaven, or hell, or purgatory : there is only an eternal interplay of light and darkness centred in one consciousness.

In this power to create one flashing impression of all the ages, of showing the primitive creatures of earth, the vales of heaven, of sensing the purgatorial pains along with the clash of earthly war as it is from age to age ; of showing man's mean cheating side by side with his intellect that reads all mysteries, is Goethe's mastery as an artist. It sets him apart from all other artists in this mode, even from Dante and his impassable gulfs ; from Michael Angelo with his concentration on the human form, the human struggle into mastery. This achievement was the real purpose of Goethe's peculiar temperament, of his cold refusal to submerge himself in the individual life of the senses and the brain. Each man builds round him in a lifetime his own cell, which may be the sensual sty, the icy palace of thought, or that pure dome of the spirit in which one waits for ecstasy. To each one his own place, for we spend a lifetime in finding where we are truly at home.

There was no such home for Goethe at all, since he lived, artistically speaking, that he might show what it is to be the meeting-place of all worlds of consciousness ; since he became in the end not a man, but Man : Man whose problem is to find, not how many angels can stand on the point of a needle, but how many planes of existence can flash simultaneously through the pin-point focus of his being. Such is the consciousness that is shown in the second part of *Faust* ; all the first part prepares for this, and unless the two sections are played consecutively there is no meaning in the great drama, for this legend tends from the opening towards the formless regions of which Schiller spoke. We have to learn from it

that, in the words of Spinoza, "man's whole spiritual life is bound up with his relations to other minds, past and present. He has such a life only in and through that universal life of which he is so infinitesimal a part that his own control of it is as good as nothing. What can be called his own? His body is a link in a cyclical chain of movement which involves all the matter of the world; his mind is a link in a great movement of thought, which makes him the momentary organ and expression of one of its phases." In this attitude of supreme detachment all life is one; there is nothing but timelessness for us to see.

The mind of Goethe is a dreadful place. There is the tortured struggle in Michael Angelo; the sinister doubleness of Nature in Leonardo; the fecundity of Shakespeare's power, terrible, overwhelming, like the stream of birth in spring; there is the giant wrestling of flesh and soul in Tolstoi. But in Goethe there is something even more overwhelming than these, for he gives us for a moment a sense as though we felt with the Divine, as though we shared the indifference of that "drowsed knitter," the Immanent Will of Thomas Hardy.

For if one looks from the clouds down on the arena whose sand is soaked with blood, one sees but colours, a mere design in red and gold; one knows nothing of the agony, or knowing, cares not at all. So perhaps the great Will feels, for does it not see all, not as a process, but as a simultaneous event? Where there is no time, no duration, but where all is one great Now, how can the pain seem endless? In Goethe, then, we see what perhaps the Immanent Will can see. Yet Goethe's God is not He who was anxious about the fall of a sparrow; He is rather a consciousness that sees no difference between process and consummation.

He is a consciousness you could have sworn no man could have realised even after a lifetime of dreaming. Yet He is none other than Goethe's God.

The little boy who used a ray of sunlight to light his altar-fire spent the best powers of his lifetime in trying to penetrate to the secret consciousness behind the ray.



## CHAPTER II

### BALZAC AND PERSONAL WILL

THROUGHOUT history there has persisted a strange interaction between man's acts and his dreams. Practical life has been in part the outcome of those ideals which have gathered, first, round the stories of great saviours, about Odin, Christ or Buddha, and second, about all common men who in smaller times have appeared as "characters," real or imaginary. Thus, the personality of the Man of Galilee is now surrounded with such clouds of imaginative thought that it is practically impossible to disinter the historic figure which gave rise to these. Yet for nearly two thousand years the history of Europe has reflected, not the personality of Jesus, but the thought-forms created in his name. Church and State are stamped alike with the impress of an imaginary Christ. In the same way, no doubt, much of the future depends on the way in which the conception of Jesus as the leader of political rebellion, the "Red Christ," is incorporated in the proletarian republics of the next century.

Passing to a lower plane, it was not so much the deeds of Napoleon as the magic of his name which in the long run diverted history into militarist and imperialist channels. As Balzac shows through the mouth of Goguelat in *Le Médecin de Campagne*, Napoleon was to his soldiers a fire-breathing wizard, invulnerable and immortal, while to the politician he was simply the living image of world dominion. And those who resisted that principle were actually battling with the spirit of the Little Corporal: yet not with the real Little Corporal, only with the thought-form of him created by the minds of nameless and forgotten millions.

When we leave history and plunge into art we must confess, too, that when a creator of fictitious characters pours



them forth with sufficient vigour and life-likeness, he also is influencing the world where men act. When such a man depicts personality he not only depicts what is: he creates what shall be. He is in himself both history and prophecy. For when he has flung his characters into the quick forge and working-house of men's thoughts they in turn set to work on his creations, enlarging, modifying and transfiguring them until at last these imaginary figures are worked into the consciousness of a race. We owe to Dickens not merely Dolly Varden hats, but certain feminine characteristics which it has taken a revolution to sweep away.

One of the greatest wonder-workers in this kind was Honoré de Balzac, who not only carried a world of human beings in his mind, but projected that world into existence with an energy which suggests the richness and power of Nature herself. It is, however, the very contradictions of Balzac's nature that hide his real significance. For when one is brought up sharp before the spectacle of a man with more than an old maid's passion for furniture, with all a fop's joy in "a divine opera glass," with a gamin's nose for garbage and a speculator's eye for the gold in a slag-heap, one is apt to overlook the divine tolerance that shone on just and unjust alike, even when it was in the very act of wielding the flail of irony over the back of human folly. The decorative extravagance of this life hides the creative significance of it, and it is as though one missed seeing Hamlet through absorption in his cross-gartered hose. But to miss this Hamlet is to remain blind to the meaning of the age of possession and its legacy for the following century.

For Balzac is significant, not only through his genius, but through his place in time. Born as he was when the new wealth was creating a new form of society, he was at once the incarnation of the spirit of his time, the prophet who foretold the course it would take, and the designer who planned some, at least, of the protean shapes through which it was to express itself.

Of the two great portraits of Balzac in existence it is Gautier's word-picture, not Rodin's statue, which holds the field. Yet the key to Balzac's life is rather in the statue than in the word-picture. In Gautier we have the mane of black

hair, the chin-fold of flesh "like the dew-lap of a young bull," the wide-lobed nostrils, the eyes that question like a priest or a doctor and "through all this embonpoint and good-humour the yellow look of a lion to counteract this Flemish familiarity": in short, the intelligence of some provincial innkeeper, a true grandson of that Balssa, labourer of Languedoc, from whom Honoré derived something of his earthy fibre. It is, on the other hand, Balzac the dreamer whom Rodin gives, the Balzac who believed that he could make himself known to his friends by a flicker of the fire or by a sudden brightening of the candle-flame. For the work that Balzac had to do neither the innkeeper nor the soldier-monk of Gautier was enough: someone was wanted whose creative will was deep enough to tap the sources of hidden instincts. It is this mystic whom Rodin found and gave in the dreaming head that tops the long dissolving shape half merged in stone, a being just issuing, as it were, from the matrix.

Born in 1799 and starting his career in 1830, fifteen years after the close of the Napoleonic Wars, Balzac painted characters instinct with the ideals of the newly evolved capitalist civilisation. In his own words the industrial revolution had begun to produce that "balm on which the Middle Class has been getting drunk ever since 1840." The bourgeoisie were in the saddle, and therefore the most suitable expression of the time is, in Balzac's own words, the commercial traveller. It is therefore his Gaudissart the Great who is the incarnation of the *joie de vivre* which comes of buying and selling, of the handling of wealth in commerce and the sharp practice of the law which supports it. Balzac's France is the Europe of the century to come, viewed remorselessly by the clearest vision: it is built on exploitation, corrupt to the heart, sordid with the frenzy of robbery by speculation, or grey with the miserly acquisition of fortunes clutched sou by sou from the mean and wretched. This was the world that delighted the Balzac of the avid nostrils, the gripping lips; into it he plunged zestfully, exploring its different strata like a pig in search of truffles.

His creative gift not only poured forth personalities with all the power of Nature, but also, so great was its influence, impressed on both the stage and the novel the idea he called

“rivalling the *état civil*”; that is, bringing into being a complete created world of imagination that shall strike the beholder as more real than life itself. In other words, it was Balzac who created an entire gallery of invented characters that, acted on by “real” life as they were and born of it, yet reacted in turn on reality itself and so became directly productive on the plane where men buy and sell, draw up contracts or engage in warfare. Ultimately, then, the characters found in the pages of his novels became the moulds into which action itself was poured.

We are here face to face with one of the most curious problems of life and letters. It is this: does the race itself, from its blood, nerve and brain, produce its genius, its typical way of acting and thinking, directly, or do the creators of fictitious personalities actually set up models round which the fancies of living men can play till they incarnate in action the image first conceived in dream? In Russia, for instance, we seem to have a nationality peculiarly sensitive to pain: is that actually a root characteristic or is it being developed because Russian artists have chosen to insist on sensitiveness, dragging it out on the hill-top by making monsters of sensibility? Again, did Dickens find in the English character Pecksniff, the Cheeryble Brothers and Scrooge in sin and repentance, or did he merely set up these beings as unconscious exemplars round which we have worked ever since towards the actual creation of national types? It is a not unimportant question, for, if it is true that the man who charms by feigning is a sort of spiritual Pied Piper, then every year that passes makes this business of character invention more important, since ever wider and wider circles of readers are being drawn into this imaginary and created over-world.

But if Balzac's creative force was so great and fruitful, we have yet to discover what was the secret of it. None of the great critics who have dealt with his work have laid much stress on the strange union of mysticism and intense practicality which marked everything he did. They have treated his spiritual force as they treated his Rabelaisianism, as a mere sun-spot over which it is well to pass lightly if one would enjoy to the full the glow of heat and light. That is fair enough treatment for jests which do little more than testify



to Balzac's possession in full of that *gauloiserie* without which he would not have been a Frenchman or, for the matter of that, a typical western European. His mysticism is, however, infinitely more significant.

It is to the story of Balzac's boyhood that we must turn for certain facts which do something to clear up the mystery of his strange double nature. The first four years of his life were passed out at nurse with his sister Laure, not in Tours, but in the country. There he laid the foundations of his "instinct of the province," getting into his blood the country atmosphere and linking himself up with the woman's nature as shown in his beloved sister for whom, we are told, he was even glad to bear punishment. A curious and very unboylike trait, especially in a child who can scarcely have had much of the saint in him. At home he feared his mother and learnt from her a sense of the difference in tone between the aristocratic and middle-class ways of living. Laure describes their father thus: "he had much in him of Montaigne, of Rabelais, and of Uncle Toby." A very suitable parental blend, indeed, for the father of Honoré, who would seem also to have derived a natural talent for mendacity from this parent.

It was, however, at the Collège de Vendôme that Balzac appears, in silence and mystery, to have begun that unification of desire which is called the training of the will. The differences in men are chiefly differences in driving-force, in that controlled and purposeful desire that acts like a main-spring. Now the chief fact which emerges from the history of Honoré's life at the Oratorian College, where he stayed from the age of eight to fourteen, is that he spent much time in the dark, dungeon-like places of punishment called the cells. In after-years the keeper of the cells was the only college master who could recall young Balzac. He took little part in the active life of the place, but in the silence of this retreat, where he managed to secrete books from the library, he was getting to grips with the central self within, that libido, or desire-principle which made the motive-power of the prodigious dynamo we to-day call Balzac. This can be deduced from that strange record of the ferment of adolescence called *Louis Lambert*. For that force within, the product of those hours of brooding, his sister has a title; she calls it *l'intuition de la renommée*,



the spur which never failed him to the end. "I am young and hungry," he cries; "there is nothing on my plate." Yet he wanted for his plate everything that the world can give—fame, wealth, power, love. But could any fitter phrase be found to describe the guiding impulse of the man who was to create an immortal picture of the time in which men chiefly lived to put something on their platters? His master burnt that Treatise on the Will which young Balzac declared would have proved his genius to the world, but he could not deprive his pupil of that fully shaped engine of desire which is the final test of mental calibre.

We know more, we know from the strange Swedenborgian dream, *Séraphita*, that Balzac had already advanced in his theories far beyond any point as yet acknowledged by mental science. For he apparently held that there is no limit to the power of the trained and obedient will; he apparently believed that a man can tap the reservoirs of power whose contents are inexhaustible simply because they are co-extensive with the universal life. Here then is the second factor in the making of Balzac, the development of a mighty drive of purpose, of confidence and, in a high sense, of appetite. This worked by means of the first factor, a body made for all the purposes to which flesh can be put. If it was his powerful physique that kept Balzac a realist, it was his grip on the power of the will that kept him true, in the main, to his one task of creation on the mental plane. He wanted wealth and power: it would have been far easier to get what he wanted by buying and selling something more tangible than the offspring of his imagination. But his brief raids into commerce were never successful. Why, indeed, should they be, since he had won the right of entry to a much more magic realm? When Balzac takes his stand in the daylight among the dealers in the market-place he is seen to be no better than a peddler of dreams.

The thing that filled Balzac's brain was the vision of a whole civilisation so that, as Brunetière says, when he produced a book it was as though a part of this world had seized on his will, used it, and flung forth the fruit of its procreative act in the shape of yet another "rival to the *état civil*." So there leaps into the daylight one aspect after another of that

visionary world: at one moment it is, in *César Birotteau*, an epic of bankruptcy, that was begotten and brought forth after a fortnight's struggle. In another mighty travail he produces his appalling picture of family life in *La Cousine Bette*, an analysis of greed, sensuality and mean ambition that is enough to damn a civilisation. He says of his own method that "a man ought to pride himself more on his will than on his talent. Though talent has its germ in a cultivated gift, will means the incessant conquest of his instincts." And if by conquest we understand guidance, we shall have here the modern method of regarding the problem of personality. In this respect Balzac had, as we should expect, not so much the patience of the craftsman as the rage of the fighter. He flung himself headlong on his task. For this reason he is no stylist: to rival life is his business, to be fruitful, not of phrases, but of human beings.

This colossal "drive" of his nature was not fully established during his school-days, since for ten whole years he fought, lonely and unaided, not to establish his power of will, for that was done, but to find it a medium of expression. Nothing came at once to Balzac: everything he possessed had to be wrestled for, and those ridiculous Ratcliffe romances of his are but the lava-rush that precedes an eruption of internal fire. Next as a printer he learnt the world of business where men fight each other as fiercely as though they had never left the jungle. That fact was the central fact of the age, and Balzac to the day of his death was never free from it. His life, like his Paris, was a crowded city where, if pitched battles are the rule in the Grande Place, then guerilla warfare is also the law of the side street. But, as if fate itself had to obey will, there is nothing left wanting in Balzac's circumstances which could give him the clue to that ugly period of history which he was to paint.

Yet there was actually one thing wanting at this time to his training: he had to be given the key to that world of women which is always the motive force of a luxurious age. For woman, by the price she sets on herself, is the ultimate director of the tides of production, the tide-mark of the commercial river. It is accordingly by his women that Balzac is to be judged.

He was indebted for his knowledge in this kind to a series of women who admitted him step by step to a complete mastery of their world, a mastery only possible to a Frenchman because no one but a Frenchman could have been admitted so freely to this garden of intuition. For, if we regard Balzac as the creator, *par excellence*, we shall be forced to confess that genius in man is a vampire which, by drawing intuitive knowledge from women's hearts, grows to its full stature only on this sustenance. The Platonic legend of the double nature of the human being perhaps explains how men and women re-inforce each other's power so that one probable reason for women's sterility in the matter of genius is the nature of the convention that forces them to live so far apart from men.

However this may be, it is certainly Balzac's knowledge of women that gives him a unique place among literary portrait-painters. If we compare him, for instance, with Richardson and Hardy, we shall find it is Balzac alone who has escaped the universal weakness of men writers in painting women, the weakness of the fixed view-point. For Richardson, in spite of all his knowledge of women, finds it impossible in his dealings with them to get away from the atmosphere of the auction-room. In his view a woman's whole existence is ruled by one thing only: by the marriage market and the price a virtuous woman may command in it. And again, when that frank woman wrote in the margin of a Hardy novel, "Oh, how I hate Hardy!" she was but expressing the natural sentiment his works inspire in beings who find themselves incessantly represented as Nature's lures, born but to reproduce and by so doing, to keep man's intellect crawling on the earth. Both Hardy and Richardson, where women are concerned, can only work in blinkers, but Balzac wears none. His women are moved by as rich a complexity of motives as his men. And although he hated an old maid as an obscene spectacle, Balzac's old maids are as lifelike and as varied as his men of the world. And anyone who has lived with a woman whose passion is for self-sacrifice will confess that the creator of Eugénie Grandet has not over-coloured her capacity for pious folly. Balzac's view of women is as varied as are the actual women made by Nature.



When we trace the influence of the four women who made Balzac a master of feminine portraiture we cannot but regret the fact that Henry Fielding never enjoyed this Frenchman's opportunity of reading this particular chapter of human nature. For these women, these lovers and friends of Balzac, were as varied in their types as the women his power was to produce. First there was Madame de Berny, already a middle-aged woman and the mother of nine children, when she takes in hand this lad of two-and-twenty. She has the long thin body, the languishing eyes, the drooping hair, that we associate with a tender heart, a scrupulous conscience and a certain lack of humour. She is a woman who gives herself to good works, in this case to the task of taming a rough earthly being to some semblance of worldly propriety. Even by devoting two hours a day for twelve years to his training, she never makes him a gentlemen; but she is the clue to his good women. She died, as good women do die, deserted by the fighting animal whom she adored.

From the next in the series, Madame Carraud, a business woman with a steady head, Balzac learnt the folly of supposing that honest women are necessarily silly sheep. This type, commoner in France than in England, is, however, now beginning to appear in English fiction, though she was not unknown to Jane Austen. Balzac made the most of her in his work, and but few of his women are without a touch of shrewd wisdom.

But it was the third woman, the Duchesse de Castries, who gave him the most valuable lesson of all, for she taught him his own helplessness against the combined power of rank and beauty. That grande dame with the splendid Venetian red hair and the languid air of secret suffering avenged a good deal of her sex's sufferings. But how Madame de Berny would have hated her!

Yet, from Madame de Berny, from Madame Carraud, from the Duchesse de Castries, he learnt. For these women simply battered the heavy bourgeois man of the provinces into a delicate sensibility where all women were concerned. The bear, in fact, learnt to dance on hot bricks in such a way that he ultimately developed a passion for the pastime. He was finally as nimble in the matter of a woman as he was where a



bargain was in question. Money and women : these are the gods of Balzac's kingdom. For all his serious expeditions into the *pays de tendre* were with women whose social rank was higher than his own. He valued above all things whatever the world set store by : he believed that the artist must needs live a life of splendour. And how can splendour be more fittingly shown than by the alliance of a Bohemian with a woman of rank and wealth ?

This gives us Madame de Hanska : especially if we add that a strong man's desire grows with resistance. But that burning of his "loulou's" letters by Balzac in a fit of prudence was a cruel blow to our curiosity, though it is more than possible that they would have added but little to our knowledge. For the main impression we gather from Madame de Hanska is one of solidity. She was not at all likely to give herself away on paper, though her acts speak eloquently enough. For she did what ninety-nine women out of a hundred long, and long in vain, to do : she kept a great man's adoration for twenty years. And can there be any more certain way of making a man faithful, at least in mind, than by showing towards him a fundamental indifference combined with all the desirability given by much absence, a good deal of elegance and charm, and the whip-hand in position and wealth ? In Madame de Hanska's hand were all the winning cards in the pack. She used them well, but if we ask for a reason, one phrase of Balzac's is enough : "on m'a salué roi," he writes, "il faut continuer à mettre des diamants à ta couronne." What woman of brains and unscrupulousness is conceivable who would not desire with all her heart to keep a tame king on leash, a king who had diamonds of fame for the giving ? It is one of the few privileges of being a woman that one can occasionally enjoy a vicarious greatness. But to marry her king was the folly : he was but a French bourgeois with a passion for doing sums, and a Polish princess used to lavishness and space would certainly find him trying in the close quarters of a Parisian *ménage*. Perhaps there was a belated sense of pity in that final step, but far more probably some motive connected with the somewhat unhappy marriage of the one person she really did love, her daughter Anna. It is significant, in this connection, that she left Balzac to die alone, but looked after his

literary business in a way he would have been the first to appreciate. But what Madame de Hanska actually did was to avenge Madame de Berny, whose place she had assumed. The good woman loved too well, putting, as good women do, all her eggs in one basket. The other woman presented a marble front to the man's passion. "Je vous aime comme un fou," says Balzac to Madame de Hanska, "à preuve que la pauvre Madame de Berny vous haïssait à la mort." Yes, it was beyond the power of woman to make him a gentleman, but no one did more than women to turn this great natural force in the direction of realism and away from sentimentality.

If a composite portrait could be produced from the long gallery of portraits in the *Comédie Humaine* we should have before us the soul of an age which was driven by the mania to possess. Balzac's country, "where they pay no taxes," is in the provinces a land of misers heaping up sou by sou with intense enjoyment; in the towns the old men are ruled by ambition, the young men by desire. Both classes are either fooled by women or make women their prey. It is a predatory world where "interests" in the form of family connections feed like a cancer growth on public morality. This state of chaos is made a thousand times worse than it would otherwise be by the presence of large numbers of discharged officers who can find nothing to satisfy their inflated sense of their own importance and by voracious priests who use subtlety to feed their greed where the soldier uses violence. The purest joy any man can feel is when his retail shop, some "Queen of the Roses" in the perfume trade, develops into a wholesale one, or when a wealthy marriage is made possible by years of prudent investment. This world is the heaven of the *rentier* and the shopkeeper. There is little or no prescience in Balzac of the approaching struggle with the proletariat, though it is shown that the peasant will defeat the middle-class possessor of the soil by sheer endurance and by a policy of incessant pin-pricks. An honest man is one who, when he becomes bankrupt, pays his debts in full and Christ Himself is figured in the form of a man who makes a countryside economically prosperous: "l'Évangile en action" is the sole form which spirituality can assume. Yet the cup of cold water is given in the *Atheist's Mass*, where the only great men are the

scientists. The idea of art and beauty is everywhere interwoven with the question of money value, and the successful woman is she who has many lovers and makes them all pay. Goodness suffers always at the hands of selfishness, yet is faithful to death, though its survival in this rank world seems like a tradition of the romantic age. Yet money and money-getting carry a curse, and no more powerful sermon against the vanity of riches was ever preached than *La Peau de Chagrin*.

But none can escape the law of ambition, not even the seeker after abstract truth. The final sentence of Balzac's creed, the ultimate expression of the gospel of possession, is given in *La Recherche de l'Absolu*, where he condemns the man who nobly gave his all in the pursuit of knowledge. To heap up household gear, to live like a Fleming, is more moral, it seems, than to set out on one of those lonely quests where the human intellect seeks to explore the darkness of the unknown. Nor do the men of this world even "consider the lilies" when they are in love, for in *Le Lys dans la Vallée* the very wild flowers themselves are used—to gain a mistress.

By the strangest irony, by the most curious interweaving of dream life and real life, Balzac dies, alone but for servants, in the midst of a museum of hoarded treasures, after the marriage of rank he had desired all his life. Nor is this the end: half a century later the famous house with its treasures is rifled by creditors and the leaves of priceless manuscripts come to wrap grocery parcels.

It is the nemesis of possession which Balzac had described so often in the kingdom of his dreams. It is a page out of his devastating passion for truth-telling. It is the postscript to *La Peau de Chagrin*.



### CHAPTER III

## SHELLEY AND THE WILL TO REBEL

To each man his own Shelley : that is the law. For the poet who was a lyric love, an ineffectual angel, a prophet of love, an apostle of licence, a seer of the future, a martyr to the past ; in the long run the greatest success that the history of literature has seen, and in the short, the greatest failure, must needs be a touchstone of every man's calibre.

To everyone, however, Shelley is a child ; to one, a naughty child, and to another a divine one, yet still a child. And perhaps, after all, the worst that can be said against the world is that it is not yet a safe one for children. Yet one fact Shelley's life undoubtedly does establish : that the world moves. For, if he had been born in 1892, instead of in 1792, he would have found many thousands to whom he could speak ; in 1792 practically everyone misunderstood him. And yet, perhaps, this begs the whole question at issue. For if Shelley had not lived, would the world be at all like what it is to-day ?

It is difficult to believe it, for, when one considers the life of a Goethe, a Balzac, or a Shelley, it seems as though each one of them had lived through in one individual lifetime what the race itself would take centuries to experience. In that sense Goethe's perception of the many planes of consciousness which meet in man, Balzac's vision of the Age of Wealth, and Shelley's scheme of the redemption of Life through Love, are but so many glimpses of the human future caught for a second in the crystal of prophecy.

In one sense Shelley has come to his own more fully than either Goethe or Balzac, for the formless world of the creative intelligence that was Goethe's workshop is still a strange and dreadful place to us, and Balzac's grim perception of the grip



of the Money God is too true to make sweet reading to men who are still entangled in the toils of Wealth ; but Shelley's vision is the thing in which we would fain believe, if only we dared. It seems, that glory of redemption which haunted him all his life, to be too good to be true. Yet what Shelley worked for, if not what Shelley believed, is in the minds of millions of common men to-day. Shelley's queer story gives, in fact, the answer to that terrible question : Is the world moving at all ; and if so, in which direction ? For there appears to be nothing more sluggish than the course of those events in which we are ourselves involved.

No man ever failed, in the homely circumstances of daily life, more completely than Shelley. His pathway through life is marked by the trail of suicide to women and of death to children. He cannot even protect his two babes from the sun and the drains of Italy. He may struggle with Byron in the attempt to provide a better refuge for Claire Clairmont's child Alba than the wretched convent of Bagna-Cavallo, but Byron can still write, neglectful parent as he was, of this Alba : " But the child shall not quit me again to perish of starvation and green fruit, or be taught to believe that there is no deity." Shelley loved children above all creatures, but he was no master of that foresight which is essential in the guardians of children. Claire's note, which runs, " Letter from Albé concerning green fruit and God," is ironical enough, but how far more absurd is the spectacle offered to the satiric gods of Byron gibing at Shelley over the question of the religious education of a child. And for the other matter of the women in his life, Shelley is even now haunted, not merely by the two who died, by poor Harriet and the timid little wraith, Fanny Imlay, but by much more robust spirits, by that " twaddling woman," Miss Hitchener, by poor Claire Clairmont, who declared when she was a very old woman that she had loved only one man, not Byron, but Shelley, and that with " her whole heart and soul." Women, wherever he went, were to Shelley but moths to his candle-flame ; he could not even start on a honeymoon without attendant, and probably envious, bridesmaids. He had in his power to give what all women desire—a love that has the scent of a god about it ; and no mere god from any heathen pantheon, a deity more animal than divine. And so Shelley

loved and passed, always seeking in the image of the Beloved "the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal."

All this is so baffling to the average good man that even Francis Thompson, though himself a poet, speaks of Shelley's "crime"; presumably in regard to Harriet Westbrook. It is worth noting in this connection that when Shelley's friend Jefferson Hogg confessed to him the attempt to seduce Harriet in the absence of her young husband, Shelley soon forgave the offence, saying to Hogg: "I value a human being not for what it has been, but for what it is." That was a feat beyond the power of most husbands who do not at all realise that eternal pursuit, that eternal rebuff, of those who seek through all fair forms for the final expression of fairness. The light of criticism which beat down so fiercely on Shelley when he was alive has beaten on him ever since. It seems a case of "He saveth others, himself he cannot save." For if a prophet sets out to tell us of a better way of living, we at least expect of him that he should not live more shamefully than we do, who have nothing better to guide us than the old dispensation.

In the matter of the reform of the world the failure of Shelley was not so tragic, but far more absurd. He goes over to Dublin in order to settle the Irish question; he is attended, of course, by Harriet and Eliza Westbrook, and they carry among their baggage a consignment of that *Address to the Irish People*, a pamphlet exhorting the Irish to a better life. This the young fool proceeds to distribute, dropping copies on people's heads as they go down the street and stuffing them into the hoods of the old women. Truly he is a child without a notion of what the world is like. He dubs himself "Atheist," since it is the worst "cuss word" he can find for the century's imbecilities. Later on, Trelawny asked him why he persisted in calling himself an Atheist, since it destroyed his chances of success in the world. He replied: "It is a word of abuse to stop discussion, a painted Devil to frighten fools." "Atheist" is still, at the end of his life, a "cuss word," and no more.

Shelley might, in fact, be described as a man who, while intent on great things, allowed himself to be beaten by little ones. In short, he is a spirit, but he is also an incurably persistent child. At the end of his life he proposes to rescue

by force an Italian who had been condemned to be burnt for sacrilege, and only desists because the sentence is commuted. He divides his income by throwing the coins on the floor in a flat cake and then drawing two lines across and across to divide the whole into four quarters. One of these was kept for himself. At Marlow he comes home shoeless because he has given his shoes to a ragged man. It almost fills one with despair to think that this was the one man who truly realised the depth of the world's pain; yet these things, these crude and childish things, were all he could do when he met misery face to face. No wonder that he gave up in despair any idea of the regeneration of the actual world by his own hands, and removed the whole scheme of regeneration, in fact, to the realm of mythology. And so, strangely enough, at last he found himself and his task for posterity.

The contrast is between the ordinary man who can tackle the immediate evil and take the snake by the right end, and the man who can so inspire men that never again can they look on a snake without wanting to pull its fangs. Ibsen and Björnson show the same antithesis; Ibsen could destroy a society by the corrosion of his criticism: he could write *Ghosts*, but he never went on a platform or petitioned a Member of Parliament over "the social evil." It was Björnson who flung his gauntlet in the face of society over the double standard of morality and actually wrote, in *The Heritage of the Kurts*, a didactic novel to show how to educate the young with a view to destroying the sexual evil. There are, in fact, both seers and schoolmasters. Both are, no doubt, useful, but both cannot be found under the skin of one man.

Shelley was neither a schoolmaster nor a citizen: he was never sufficiently implicated in the life of the flesh to take naturally to these callings. His existence is never wrapped heavily in the voluminous folds of this life's garment. In this respect he is at the opposite pole to Walt Whitman, who cannot die, who has to be struck again and again by palsy, and who in his great day of inspiration found the flesh to be the true shining cloak of divinity. Shelley lives lightly, dies lightly, with a touch from the storm and the sea. It is an end as symbolically true as that passing of Balzac amongst the collection of antiquities in the richly decorated Paris flat.



Shelley had always been "a phantom among men"; and after he had vanished out of sight the little company of his friends at Lerici remembered those curious beckonings from the Unseen that had heralded his departure. There is the tale of Shelley seen entering a wood at a moment when his body was known to be elsewhere; the vision of Byron's child, Allegra, twice seen beckoning on the waves by Shelley himself; the strange dream of the cloaked figure that also beckoned the dreamer. Ariel, as they afterwards felt, had heard the song of the other world; he was only lent to us men.

Francis Thompson, poet as he himself is, in his great Essay on Shelley, imputes all this "lightness," this unearthly quality, to—Eton. According to this view Shelley never grew into a man because he was never allowed to be a boy by those cowardly young hooligans to whom "Shelley baiting" was the most popular form of rag. Being thus dammed back into loneliness, the child Shelley had no social intercourse with his kind and therefore had no chance to steep himself in the dye of earth.

This is to give more honour to Eton than it deserves. Eton undoubtedly first made the child Shelley realise that he was one against the world. But to that result other elements contributed—Oxford, Timothy Shelley, the Lord Chancellor, and even the mean-spirited, hypocritical moneymonger Godwin. But Shelley was born for this lonely position; by some miracle he had come down, plumped out of the Platonic over-world into a respectable county family whose sole claim to the honour of giving birth to a seraph seems to have been the fact that some of the family ancestors had served lost causes. In this place where he came to birth men, very slowly, very painfully, were straining to emerge from pure animality. He was born, apparently, in order that he might speed up the process of this emergence. But he brought with him no wisdom, no experience by which he could understand the men and women who could only keep themselves out of the slime whence they have drawn themselves by clinging to those stakes in the mud-bed which are called the laws of morality. In proportion, of course, as men come under the law of love, of other-consciousness, the less they need the moral law. But to those still heavily implicated in the folds of the flesh



"Thou shalt not" is the only guide they possess. Whitman could cheerfully beget six sons and, as far as we can tell, could do it without the heartbreak of women or gnashing of teeth on the part of the upholders of the Decalogue. But then Whitman had, of all men, the wisdom of the flesh; his right of entry to the Kingdom of Heaven is a hospital pail. Shelley, a being of another element than the earth, could not even realise why men stoned him, nor why Harriet could not be a friend to him after she had been ousted from the lover's place.

The two matters where one touches the quick of life are religion and sex. The laws of both these elements were defied by Shelley, and his defiance seemed simply licence to men who acknowledged the Law, and the Law alone, as the highest peak of aspiration to which they could lift their eyes. But to Shelley the far distant horizons were the only real things, and the Law was to him but a painted back-cloth. He could not understand that, in religion, creeds are symbols for simple people, people who cannot see God at all without a sign for Him. That "Good wine needs no bush" is a true saying, but only for those passers-by who know what wine Mine Host keeps in his cellar. You must have had tremendous experience of the goodness of the divine before you can see it at every step of the way. Shelley at times seemed to see God everywhere; the wine of life in every inn, except in the kingdom of the human. For the nearer one comes to a sensing of the ineffable mystery at the heart of life, the less one needs a creed, or a Law; there is a point indeed on the upward journey when all creeds are seen as so many curses, dividing man from man, and teaching all manner of bitter pettiness. At the best, they weaken, as a crutch weakens a man who refuses to trust to the muscles of his legs.

In sex, too, the man who can only keep himself from gluttony in the fruit garden by strictly legislating for himself must needs eye with horror, yet with a luring sense of obscene attraction, the spirit which can love and pass in that incessant search for the divine ideal of all fairness. Plato understood this; but Harriet Westbrook could not. What she wanted was a husband who would continue to give her children and fashionable clothes. A more appalling contact of high and

low was never seen than this union of the "pardlike" spirit and the little schoolgirl. Shelley could not realise for her, nor even for Mary Godwin, what love for a man means to a woman who is implicated in the motherhood of the flesh. Plato was harder on mothers than on any other creature in his Republic. And Shelley was cruel to women as only a child can be to those whom he cannot understand. Harriet could not meet him on any plane but one ; neither could Mary herself, nor any of the many women who loved him. For he was seeking both in men and women what is not to be found on earth at all. Never, even in the record of Shelley's friendships with men, is there to be found a real face-to-face equality, though Trelawny seems to have come as near as any to it. And even after his death, though Francis Thompson wrote one of the most beautiful pieces of prose in the English language on Shelley, yet he sees only the Shelley who played like a glorious child with the stars of Heaven, and not at all the Shelley of the "branded and ensanguined brow, which was like Cain's or Christ's." Of that Shelley, even when he catches a glimpse of him, Thompson is contemptuous. His sufferings he finds almost an affectation. He insists upon the fact that Shelley never tasted the bitter cup of indigence, that he had a most loyal and sympathetic wife, and enjoyed the free right to wander through the loveliest spots of earth ; finally, that the persecutions from which he suffered had been fully earned.

Probably Shelley's real agony came from none of these things ; he had gained for himself an infamous name ; he lived in an alien world. All this was true ; yet it was not the real sting. The fact which burnt and tortured was that, although he saw all hell around him, he could not assuage its scorching by so much as a drop of water at the tip of a finger. Shelley died neglected, with his message disregarded ; Stopford Brooke remarks that when the poet died scarcely fifty people in England cared to read him. He had sunk, apparently disregarded, into oblivion. Yet now, to all the lovers of liberty, to all who pray and work for the passing away of tyranny, hardness, cruelty and oppression, his is the most vital and creative current of influence in all the realm of literature. He has become in the mental world the Prometheus of endurance and resistance to evil. Byron, on the other hand,

who had all his good things in this life, had to be raised out of his grave by industrious journalists at the time of his centenary. Put at its lowest, this fact might be said simply to prove that the taste of the people is improving ; put at its highest, that the heart of the nation is being transformed.

It is curious in this connection to note what an extremely lucid French mind can make of Shelley. For perhaps of all Englishmen Shelley is most alien to the Latin intellect, a mind that has always refused to detach itself from the actual, or to lose sight of the real in the vision of the ideal ; a mind whose prophets are Rabelais and Anatole France, not Shelley and Blake ; whose drama produced, not a Shakespeare, but a Molière ; whose most spiritual soul was a Jaurès, a man who lived for peace and died a violent death for so doing. André Maurois, in his study of Shelley, which he calls *Ariel*, gives in the simple, inimitable French manner the man Shelley as he would appear to a novelist, to one for whom the interest of life lies in its everyday doings ; one who could not see the poet as an angel, or a bird, and still less as a creature crucified on the Pain of the World. At a first reading of *Ariel* one is inclined to deny the author the right to use this title. Yet, after all, it is not so ill-named, for Maurois's Shelley is a dancing figure of the air ; it is Shelley pinned to earth, yet whirling strangely across it, as an insect might whirl who has escaped from the collector's hand, but still carries with it the pin with which it has been transfixed.

Every critic, whether English or French, shrinks from the realisation of Shelley as one might suppose he would seem when viewed from the standpoint of the Eternal. He is so great, so poignant and terrible a figure that we must turn to his own most extraordinary description of himself :—

“ A pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift—  
 A Love in desolation masked ;—a Power  
 Girt round with weakness ;—it can scarce uplift  
 The weight of the superincumbent hour ;  
 It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,  
 A breaking billow ;—even whilst we speak  
 Is it not broken ? ”

Only the simplest words can paint him ; yet only the most terrible words will reach the soul of him. He is in all of us



who are beginning to sense that widening of the bounds of personal life that comes first in a wave of suffering. For the first promise of this new life of other-consciousness is a pang shared with some suffering, some torture of another sentient creature; it may be the pain of a helpless and bewildered beast, or the sorrow of one man's hopeless heart. It comes sometimes with a pulse that thuds with indignation; or at others with a misery of slow heart-break. But the sting, the goad, is always the same—pity, the implication of the self in the suffering of another; and finally, pity for both the tyrant and the victim; for the savage and for the thing helpless in his hands. The root of the pang is always the same: it is the feeling of helplessness that racks one; it is the cry "My power is so small, and the sea of misery is so vast." To dip up the ocean with a limpet-shell: that is our curse.

This is what Shelley faced in its extreme form. Practically, and years before he died, he had given up the idea of the regeneration of the world. There were no more of those pamphlets called *An Address to the Irish People*. And although he became the inspiration of others, it is his sorrow that he never knew it. He could not say to anyone, "I have shown the way to Paradise." He was always alone on his cross; he could not know as we do, even when we are at our most hopeless point, that there are thousands of pitiful souls who answer to our pity when we cry it aloud. We hear now that Chorus of the Pities on every side; it comes to us with every wind that blows. But Shelley was derided when he caught the lowing of the beasts in the shambles, or the tortures of the diseased; he heard the misery of the madhouse, and devotes his poem of *Julian and Maddalo* to that visit he paid to an asylum on the Lido. He heard all the cries of those who are chained, from the kennelled dog to the mind that is thwarted and denied its wings. Only in vision, and very far off, did he see the overthrow of tyranny. He savoured the bitterest waters of that consciousness of the world of suffering that was opening before the mind of the race; of that passion which has fired the soul of so many creative spirits, from Ibsen to Hardy and Dostoevsky; which is now nerving to incessant fight many thousands who, in the old days, would never have



realised the existence of this suffering. To all imprisoned, suffering creatures, from the vivisected beasts to the ponies going blind in a mine, from the ill-used children to the cruel denial of the means of full and joyous life to those who make the world's wealth : to all these men go to-day in the name of that " infamous " one who was denied the right to care for his own children. And, to speak truth, not perhaps unjustly, or unwisely, denied. It is the queerest paradox in the world that Shelley, who is the Saviour spirit in literature, could not save his own babes from " green fruit " and all that it stands for.

Between the age which produced the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus and the century of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, wonderful things were happening. If these two plays are put side by side it will be found that the difference between them is not in design, but in spirit. One is drawn in barest outline and the other is filled with all the richness of spiritual experience which in the depths of its being the human race has been undergoing. Long ago, centuries ago, Æschylus went much farther than Hardy in his criticism of the righteousness of the Immanent Will. The Greek Jupiter, Father of Gods and men, is frankly an evil-doer, the being who uses his might always cruelly and unjustly ; the critical Will of Man which in Hardy simply wonders at the god's ill-doing, in Æschylus revolts. Shelley shows him still revolting through Age after Age. And the difference between Shelley and Æschylus in spirit is that the Greek shows in Prometheus a defiance which springs from hate, while the Englishman inspires that defiance with love and pity, even towards the unjust god.

Thus there are two worlds of feeling in the two plays. And Shelley's world is filled besides with myriads of created beings who are covered and represented in Æschylus by the bare Promethean name. Mists cover the whole earth in *Prometheus Bound* ; but in *Prometheus Unbound* the mists have come nearer and we see that they are alive with armies of sentient creatures, all Promethean, all awaiting the hour of deliverance, for all are in the trammels of pain and constraint. In Shelley's poem the orders of creation, both mythological and natural, are poured forth from his creative mind with a fecundity that recalls the vision of Goethe's *Faust*. The creatures of the

actual drama of Jupiter's overthrow show Shelley the Poet at his height of power ; he flings them about as a child playing with the stars of Heaven ; but those who are so redeemed by this drama of the Spirit are not mythological or of the fancy : they are the humblest creatures of the earth. The Spirit of Man that is personified in Prometheus, the spirit that resists all things, refuses all Circe dreams of ease, and bears an age-long torture, will go on doing these things until the very hedgerows full of humble life are "redeemed," and not a toad or an eft can suffer. From the earth, thus redeemed, there flows out a wave of release, of blessing, which reaches the angels, the beings of other planets, and not these alone, but even worms and creeping things. For

"The spirit of the worm beneath the sod  
In love and worship blends itself with God."

The barrier-destroying age of other-consciousness that was coming is foreseen by Shelley, who is among the first to suffer from its great and rending birth-pangs. But he sees far beyond it. The spirit of the Earth wails over the ugliness of the life that nestles in her breast :—

"Thou knowest that toads, and snakes, and loathly worms,  
And venomous and malicious beasts, and boughs  
That bore ill berries in the woods, were ever  
An hindrance to my walks o'er the green world :  
And that, among the haunts of humankind,  
Hard-featured men, or with proud, angry looks  
Or cold, staid gait, or false and hollow smiles,  
Or the dull sneer of self-loved ignorance,  
Or other such foul masks, with which ill thoughts  
Hide that fair being whom we spirits call a man.  
And women too, ugliest of all things evil——

When false or frowning made me sick at heart  
To pass them . . ."

It is this aspect of things that is changed when with a "long, long sound as it would never end," the heart of man has wrought the miracle of love and all things grow beautiful. For to Shelley's vision all creatures are beings of one almighty life ; all creatures share the suffering, therefore all creatures must share in the great consummation of their suffering.

In the first decades after the French Revolution Shelley could not be endured. For in the eyes of responsible men at that time society was a land protected by dykes against a raging sea ; it was a beleaguered city, and the smallest sally-port left open meant the destruction of everything. There must be no criticism of the established order, nor, worst still, any dissemination of the idea of a new order. In the universal state of panic it was almost as dangerous to allow the Prince Regent to be called "an Adonis of fifty" as it was for a blasphemer to question the theory of war's righteousness, the doctrine of the Trinity or the inviolability of the marriage contract.

Shelley was the Snake in the threatened Paradise of respectability—and safety: all that the race had won could be brought down like a pack of cards ; would be, if he were allowed to breathe on it with his miasmatic breath. So it was at first, when this youth of nineteen flew in the face of family and nation ; but later on he sank lower, becoming, as Byron said, "a bad investment." No one read his poems or cared for his metaphysics. He was incomprehensible, except as an atheist and profligate. Shelley's faith in the possibility of perfecting human nature was his worst crime in the eyes of those who in any way understood it. To others who, like Byron, simply found it "mystifying," it was boring. The bored might have forgiven Shelley, but the others could not, for to believe in the perfectibility of humanity is to summon one to join in the work for it. And to attempt to awaken the sluggard has always been a dangerous job.

Shelley could not make the world listen to him ; therefore he was naturally an object of contempt to Byron, who, for all his genuine love of liberty, was one of the finest stage-managers ever born. His "lighting" of his own genius, his own personality, is superb. He uses all Europe as his background ; and does it most economically, by seducing a few women instead of by killing millions of men. He is an actor, but then he knows how to act. When he crosses Europe with all the animals out of Eden in his train, it is as though men's eyes followed the trail of a meteor. He knows how to keep the "spot-light" on himself all the time. And if life were only a review day, with trumpets sounding and steeds curvetting,



then Byron would enjoy a perpetual immortality. The soul of Byron still speaks in every romantic, in every sentimentalist, as the soul of every humanitarian lives in Shelley. Byron's death is in keeping with his life ; for does he not "go down" like a sunset when it sinks in a bed of fire ? Even his naïve cynicism is a splendid "gesture," for, indeed, he lives and breathes in "gestures." "My beau-ideal," he says, "would be a woman with talent enough to understand and value mine, but not sufficient to shine herself." It is a magnificent truth, for in it there is hit off, in one great phrase, the true nature of man. For man, like Byron, does everything to the greater glory of—himself.

Shelley could neither stage himself, nor could anyone do it for him. For he lives very far indeed from the springs of histrionic greatness. He has, instead, to pray that strange, wistful, yet magnificent prayer to posterity :—

" Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth,  
And, by the incantation of this verse,  
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind."

So, indeed, it is with him now. For, after all, the spirit did not leave him all darkling in the night of his despair. He saw at moments what he would become through his great gift to man of "that best philosophy, whose taste

" ' Makes this cold common hell, our life, a doom  
As glorious as a fiery martyrdom.' "

In our days Bernard Shaw is allowed to declare that Christ died on the Cross because He had become insane, but the preacher in Hyde Park cannot make a joke about the Virgin Birth without the intervention of a policeman. The insignificant man is poor and a nuisance, because he speaks to other insignificant people who ought to be kept obedient, but it is tacitly assumed by common consent that Bernard Shaw is too "witty" to be taken seriously. The difference between our time and Shelley's is that, if you can put your "blasphemy" in the form of an aphorism to-day, you are acquitted. In the times of Byron vice was pardoned, and moral criticism



penalised. And rightly so, from the point of view of the moralists, for, although Byron might break every law in the Decalogue, he never interfered with the Categorical Imperative. Shelley, however, never consciously committed an act that he would not have us all follow. Therefore far more fuss was made over Shelley and Harriet than over Byron and all his harem. For Byron was a public blessing to the man of the world: he enabled him to shudder and feel good.

But Shelley came to his own generation literally as a spirit from another order of being than that of the flesh. Later on, Dostoevsky was to explore the destiny of those Timeless Spirits who try to express themselves in time through the medium of pure Will; but Shelley, long before Dostoevsky, had in himself expressed the destiny of him who comes out of the Timeless into Time as a spirit of pure Love. The fate of these protagonists of the Future is "obscene," to use Mr. Middleton Murry's word. On the plane of things done in the flesh there is nothing but a grotesque mockery to be expected when spirit in its pure shape comes down into incarnation. And therefore it is only in the realm of the creative imagination that Shelley is able to spread his wings in the sunshine. So far he is infinitely happier than those sullen Russians who will and will and will, till there is nothing left them in the world but Will.

But Shelley, who lived always on that strange dividing line where spirit meets flesh, was able to play in his poetry an infinite number of melodies wherein the spirit is seen clothed in music. We talk glibly in churches of man made in the image of God, but is this ever true unless man is seen playing the god through creation? Shelley almost alone among poets does this thing. He can pass from the spirit to the flesh and back again as lightly as a child that jumps a stream, or as dazzlingly as the lightning that plays across the sky. Finally, he sees in one great flash the consummation of the ages: he sees, not men, but Man. This child who "dances in and out of the gates of heaven" sees the time when the gates shall be no more shut between heaven and earth. For Shelley, who lived in the age when thought was going to overthrow all the barriers between the different orders of beings on earth, foresaw far more than this, even the tremendous unity of the

race itself, when spirit can express itself instantly and directly in form, for humanity has become

“ Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,  
Whose nature is its own divine control,  
Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea . . . ”

The dawn of this light, which grows wider and wider as the centuries unfold, was seen by none more clearly than by Shelley. And the tumbling ecstasies of that Fourth Act of *Prometheus Unbound* are indeed the harmonies which sound above all the turmoil and mental strife of the time when men were learning to do consciously and of set, deliberate purpose what they had long been doing instinctively and blindly :—

“ To defy Power, which seems omnipotent . . . ”

For that is the very heart of Shelley's vision.

*PART III*

THE VICTORIAN MIND: THE  
SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

CHAPTER I.—CARLYLE

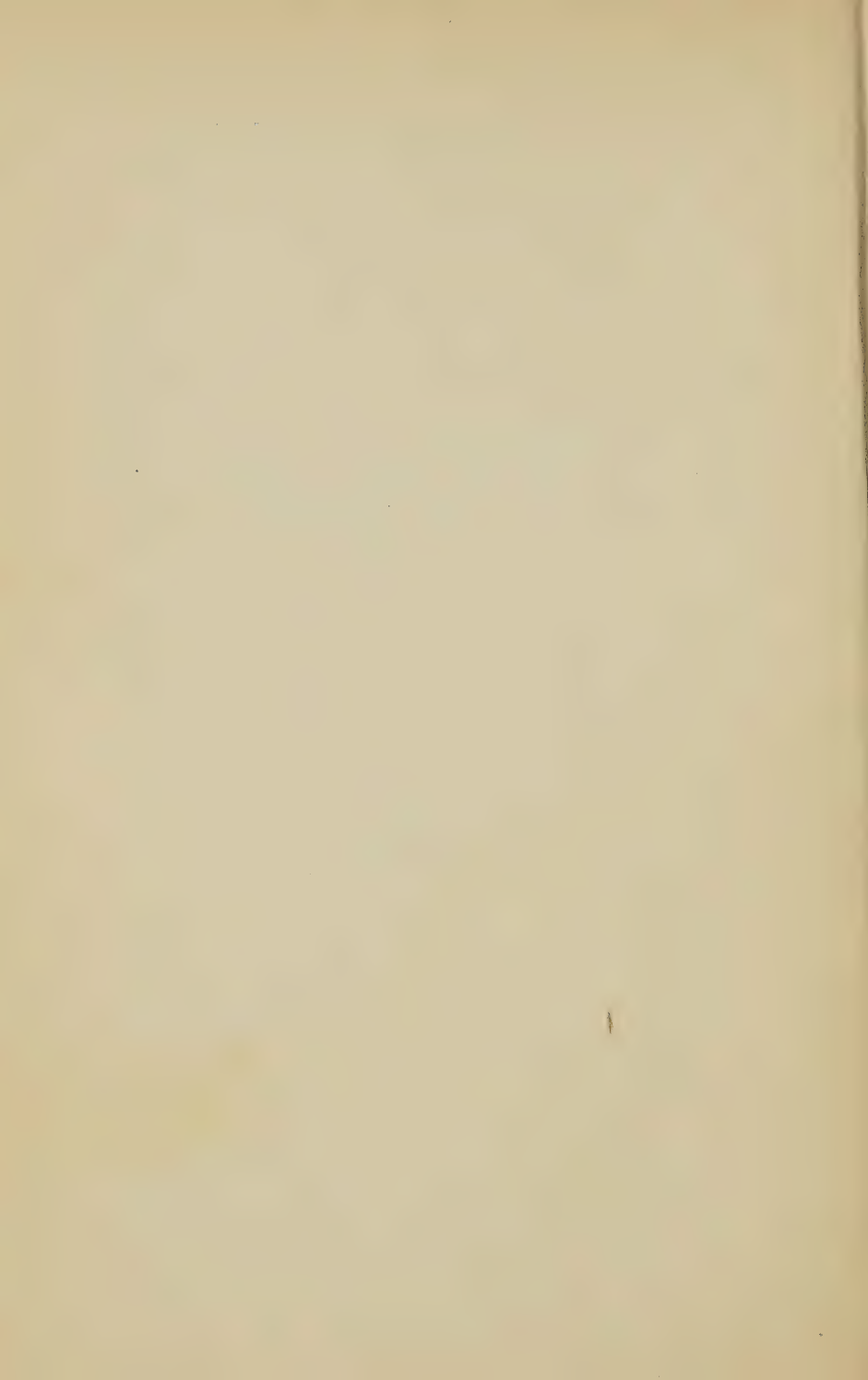
CHAPTER II.—GEORGE ELIOT

CHAPTER III.—THACKERAY

CHAPTER IV.—TROLLOPE

CHAPTER V.—DICKENS

CHAPTER VI.—TENNYSON





## CHAPTER I

### CARLYLE

WHATEVER century we study, we find it possessing an individuality that is as clearly stamped on its fashions and turns of speech as on its thoughts and deeds. For this reason the personalities of an epoch seem like a crowd passing across a shaft of light thrown from a pane of coloured glass. This effect is a matter of stress and accent which depends on a temperament held in common. Thus, when human nature is in an audacious, an all-defying mood, we get the times of Queen Elizabeth when both seafarers and heaven-scaling geniuses are begotten by one and the same impulse. At another period men are timid and overcome by the idea of how hard it is to be good. Then Puritanism is born and repression becomes the new note.

In yet another age men become possessed by the notion that, given only a slight change in the structure of society, human nature would also become transformed and man would find it easy to enter the Earthly Paradise. Such was the belief that inspired the French Revolution and lasted into the succeeding decades. And there is no deeper gulf in our annals than that between the joyous optimism, the belief in a sudden quick transit from the worst to the best, of the revolutionary thinkers of that time and the disillusioned reliance on slow betterment that prevails in our days. The Soldiers in the War who chose "It's a long, long way to—Tipperary" for their marching song were well inspired: they but echoed the temper of their day. The French Revolution left another spirit: one of hope. It was confidently believed then that if man could but return to a state of Nature, he would be at once well on the way towards the Golden Age.

The Golden Age came; in the form of mass production,

of child labour and slum cities on the one hand, and on the other, of prodigious wealth in the hands of a few. The Golden Age failed to bless either the poor or the rich. The nineteenth century was spent in making the discovery that it was a dead failure, as far as Paradise was concerned. But it was evident that man had not yet returned to a state of Nature ; that, therefore, remained to be tried.

Before long, however, mankind had lost all confidence in that panacea ; had done so, indeed, even before the end of the century. The new idea then was that, if one mended up the old order of society, using various political expedients, such as the vote and popular education, men would enter upon a far better life than any they had known. The idea of pastoral joy was deserted for a vision of orderly streets, well-drained cities, and obedient and contented toilers. So the thinkers thought. They were divided, however, into two schools by the question as to how much liberty could be safely allowed to the common people ; that is, to the bulk of the nation, and how far they must be treated as children ; one school voted for a perpetual nursery, the other for a family council.

This Short Way to the Millennium engaged the attention of politicians and preachers throughout the century, but underneath this activity an unseen solvent was at work, a solvent which was to destroy the very stuff out of which all divisions of society are constructed. The forms into which life was to flow were being settled ; to flow for ever, or so it seemed. Yet, while the forms were being arranged, a new spirit was coming on the scene, a spirit that would ultimately render all these forms quite futile. The human mind was then starting on an exploration tour of its own world within, of its consciousness. This tour led man, and is still leading him, into very strange regions. He began, very soon after the expedition was started, to find himself bathed in a tremendous sea of sentience, a sea in which it is very hard to disengage the parts from the whole. Under this new perception entirely different values presented themselves to his mind ; new values in politics and practical life as well as in religion and thought.

It took a century for this great volte-face in man's reaction to life and being to accomplish itself ; and indeed the process is still continuing. We are only now beginning to realise what

a tremendous revolution it is to turn from form to consciousness as a mode of apprehending existence ; we are only now starting to realise how this must at last change everything about us, both within and without.

The nineteenth century creators of personality in England worked for the most part under the dictation of the old order of thought : they saw each man, each class, each nation, as separate entities ; they saw Nature here and Humanity there. And therefore Colonel Newcome's idea of Heaven is of a place where he can reply *Adsum* to a divine master, and neither the Colonel nor his creator has any notion of a region where the beings of the natural order and the beings of the spiritual can be at one ; no notion of an existence beyond Good and Evil as these words are understood on earth. To the typical Christian of the Victorian age it was blasphemous to suggest that something far more primitive than the events in Christ's life are recalled in the festivals of the Church, and that the celebration of, for instance, the miracle of Easter, is a Nature rite as well as a Christian one. One kept oneself very select in those days ; and how could a Christian priest possibly hobnob with a Pagan one ? Even heaven itself was a matter of strictly graded compartments. But the joy of keeping only the company that suited one went out with the Squire's pew, the decay of gentlemen's "seats," and the dismissal of the butler and footmen. The deluge is now upon us, that deluge which sweeps away old dividing lines of every kind and carries us all out, man and animal, plant and atom, living and passed over, noble and ignoble, into the uncharted ocean.

Two prophets there were who foresaw something of the vastness of this upheaval. One foresaw it with joy as containing infinite promise for the future ; the other only with dread and horror. For one of the prophets was Shelley and the other Thomas Carlyle. To the former it brought the inspiration of *Prometheus Unbound*, since to Shelley it meant the free uprush of the spirit through the crust of ages, an uprush that would bring redemption to all the orders of life on this planet and even, perhaps, beyond it. The love in man's heart, being freed at last, would work a spheric miracle.

To Carlyle, on the other hand, this uprush meant anarchy and lawlessness. For though his mind, moving easily along



the roads of history, could think in epochs and realise vividly the changing ideals of the generations as they rise and pass, it could not produce a faith great enough to face a change that seemed to threaten all the hallowed sanctities of the past. Yet he could not but hear the tremulous quiver of the sea of life that heralded the coming of this vast tidal wave of change. And so half, at least, of his great force of passion is turned into a protest against democracy, against the destruction of ancient loyalties to man and class ; he sweeps into one anathema every symptom of the new order, from its ballot-boxes to its depreciation of the warrior, the soldier-saint, or, for the matter of that, of the soldier who is not a saint. Man, says Carlyle, became man by battle ; how then shall he not sink back into the brute if he denies the very principle by which the brute became man ? Truth to tell, he is not much concerned about the brutal residuum left in man by this process.

FitzGerald writes in 1846 : " I met Carlyle last night at Tennyson's, and they two discussed the merits of this world and the next, till I wished myself out of this, at any rate. Carlyle gets more wild, savage, and unreasonable every day, and I do believe will turn mad." It is a portrait of a man on the rack ; indigestion had, no doubt, much to do with the torture, but vision had far more, that vision of what was coming, the vision from which FitzGerald himself was happily free.

In building up the portrait of Carlyle we must start with the strange keenness of his senses, particularly of sight and hearing. In every way he both saw and heard more than other men. And that top storey of Number 5, Cheyne Row, which was turned into a soundproof refuge against the din of cats, cochin-chinas, macaws, barrel-organs, scales and demon-fowls, is the symbol of his place in literature. For internally, as though by a spiritual duplication of power, he heard what he would fain have avoided hearing, the rough bourdon, like that of imprisoned waters, of the change in human ideals which was to sweep away the structure of nineteenth-century life. And the more clearly he heard this menace, the more fiercely did he build his breakwaters of defence.

Of his sense of sight Emerson speaks thus : " Nothing seems hid from those wonderful eyes of yours ; those devour-



ing eyes ; those thirsty eyes ; those portrait-eating, portrait-painting eyes of thine." Carlyle both saw and foresaw as did no other man of his age, perhaps as no other man ever has. In his later years, indeed, he is like a beast in a cage who, as he claws his bars, by instinct senses the drawing near of the flames which are to burn these bars to ashes. But the pathos of the situation is that he believed with all his soul that these very bars were the only means by which mankind could be kept from destruction.

On those old Cameronian graves of the Carlyles is their coat-of-arms : two griffins with adders' stings. It is an amazingly suitable symbol for the family character which was as stark in thought as it was precise and vigorous in language. Thomas says of his father : " Nothing did I ever hear him take to render visible which did not become almost ocularly so." Could any words be found that more accurately describe the way in which the author of *The French Revolution* made visible that which he saw with the eyes of the mind ? For to this racial gift for realising an object precisely as it is nothing whatever comes hidden in cloud ; both father and son deal only in definite sight. The elders of the kirk dispute at the meeting-house door over the question of the resurrection. Says Carlyle the elder, " Robert Scott was for the same body rising again—I observed that I thought a stinking clog of a body like Robert Scott the weaver's would be very unfit to inhabit those places." Hearing such words, one cannot but wonder who is the forgotten genius of the past to whom we owe that addition of the adders' stings to the Carlyle griffins. And of that same father we learn further that " in anger he had no need of oaths ; his words were like sharp arrows that smote into the very heart " ; that he appropriated " all manner of potent words," painting the most perfect pictures with them " in full white sunlight."

This hereditary gift of vision it was that made the warp and woof of Carlyle's genius as prophet and artist. From his mother came the tenderness that made him human, the pity for the transitory and evil life of man, together with a certain hope in a spiritual future somewhere, a hope that was indefinite in him, though clear to her faith. Tenderly he speaks of his forbears, in terms that must echo in every thoughtful heart :

"They are gone now, vanished all; their poor little bits of clothes; their little life, it is all away. It has all melted into the still sea." The inspiration of this is the same as that of his most magnificent passage: "Where now is Alexander of Macedon; does the steel host that yelled in fierce battle shouts at Issus and Arbela remain behind; or have they all vanished utterly, even as perturbed goblins must?—Ghosts! There are nigh a thousand million walking the earth openly at noontide . . ."

From his honest, plain-spoken ancestors Carlyle got also what was the root principle of all his thinking, of all his social theory: "If the poor and humble toil that we have food, must not the high and glorious toil for him in return, that he may have guidance, freedom, immortality? These two in all degrees I honour; all else is chaff and dust, which let the wind blow whither it listeth." It was Carlyle's supreme dread that this law of life would be violated in the new order of society. And he was right: his principle is so changed, has suffered such mental transformation, that few of us to-day could subscribe to it as he did: we cannot ultimately acquiesce in two orders of beings within the human family, one "poor and humble," the other "high and glorious."

Carlyle is still the touchstone of our age as he was, in his lifetime, of his own. He is perhaps the most honest man, the most forthright thinker we possess in our literature. He saw with those piercing eyes of his the present and the future. To him, with the intensity of vision that was his birthright, the structure that the Time Spirit was building in his time was but transitory, as transitory as the ghosts who built it. And all the contradictions of thought and feeling in Carlyle are explained if we realise clearly that the place where two tides meet is apt to be marked by a line of foam.

Ever since the Stone Ages men have practically been engaged in one task; that is, in learning to work together in common. There are still only two conceivable ways in which this co-operation can be accomplished: either by the caste system, in which the authority of the few imposes obedience on the many, or by a spiritual order ruled by good will and carried out by the spontaneous desire of each man to do his utmost for the common well-being. The tragedy and the power of Carlyle's life is

that he alone, in his own time, perceived clearly, with that eagle vision of his, that he stood at the point where the caste system was being fatally undermined, even at the very moment when it seemed most splendidly enthroned. Everywhere, especially in his later days, he saw the incursion of that personal will-power, that personal individualisation, which to him meant social dissolution. Like a man on a ledge, who foresees that the tide must ultimately cover it, he trembles at every hiss of the advancing waves. It is in the midst of that dissolution of society which Carlyle foresaw that we are living to-day. Where he looked out on one phase of struggle, that between landlordism and commercialism, we behold the deadlier strife of capital and labour. But Carlyle was not deceived: he saw that behind these outer conflicts the battle of the spirit is being waged, and that is always one; it is between caste order and spiritual order, between co-operation by force and co-operation by good will, by the good will of the Whole; by millions of spiritual beings. It is the tragedy of Carlyle that, although he knew—no man better—that the loveliest order in the world is that of free service, he could not believe in it in its new, its revolutionary form.

From first to last Carlyle is incapable of seeing any beauty in the social order that is not founded on obedience, rooted in authority and based on the law of the strong man. And by "strong man" he meant the man who can impose his will on others and carve out for himself a design in destiny as a man cuts a shape from wood. Such men make the laws and customs which put both individuals and races in their proper places; such men, when they impose an ideal on their generation, create also the idea of "duty"; that is, of obedience to that ideal. By this process alone could Carlyle conceive of order being brought into human affairs. The watchword of his system is action, is bringing things to pass by moulding and compressing masses of men into obedience to a common ideal of conduct.

The whole current—on the surface—of national and imperial life ran, in Carlyle's lifetime, in this direction: towards the building-up of new channels of world-trade, towards the welding of races, under the influence, mainly, of Saxon, or Teuton. Carlyle's part in all this is that of conscience-keeper.



He had to supply a spiritual excuse for all this flamboyant forcefulness. And nobly he did it, too, voicing the splendid creed which we have poetically named the White Man's Burden ; the creed of service to the lower beings which is the excuse for commercialism, militarism and imperialism. At one moment, when he saw the age going after selfish pleasure, he is its scourge ; at another, he is its trumpeter, especially when he sees some Strong Man, some Frederick the Great, deifying the impulse of the period by some supreme fulfilment of purpose. Carlyle's gospel of work, of leadership, and the fight for leadership, of the right to guide the masses, " mostly fools," fell in most aptly with the mood of the time. For, austere and truth-telling as Carlyle was, by the irony of that most ironical of facts, the nature of things, his gospel of work and duty became the most powerful instrument of hypocrisy the world has ever used. It is, of course, true that, if Carlyle had never been born, Britain would have grown into a great commercial power and Germany into a military one. The births of Watt and Crompton and of Frederick of Prussia, the emergence of races pliable to the impulse of the machine, would still have shaped history. The purpose of destiny would have been fulfilled. What Carlyle did was to provide for these expanding nations the fine conception that they were acting with God's blessing, because they were doing His will : His will of increase, multiply and rule for the good of all. Seen from the standpoint of to-day, these claims, these ideas, must needs seem sinister rather than splendid.

Yet, in fact, this prophet of his age was a deeply unhappy, a deeply disillusioned man ; and this not merely because he knew that the social order then being built in the name of the God of order could not last. He knew, only too well, that in the forms of power which were going up all round him he could not truly rejoice. He was far too honest and clear-sighted to do so. There were, indeed, but two forms of power from which to choose, the commercial and the military. And how could a Carlyle take pleasure in any aristocracy of the Moneybag ? Perforce, therefore, he was driven to the military ideal and had to make the best of it, willy-nilly. He therefore idealises Prussianism till he can write : " Who conquered anarchy and chained it everywhere under their feet ? Not the Jews with



their morbid imaginations and foolish sheepskin Targums. The Norse with their steel swords guided by fresh valiant hearts and clear veracious understandings, it was *they* and not the Jews. The supreme splendour will be seen there, I should imagine, and not in Palestine or Houndsditch any more." Carlyle looked backward to the world which was ruled by the sword of strong and simple men. There he found the best order he could conceive.

And, as we look back with him at that old order of civilisation, we too may still feel the nostalgia of desire. Is it not noble, that past age, for all the shadow of the sword that lay across it? The universe of man is then a hierarchy with, it is presumed, the noble in high places, the ignoble in low ones; "this is in all times and all places the Almighty Maker's law." And so Carlyle asks: "Cannot one discern, across all democratic turbulence, clattering of ballot-boxes and infinite sorrowful jangle, that this is at bottom the wish and prayer of all human hearts everywhere, Give me a leader?" To the man who thought like this, Prussia must needs be the centre of stability and Frederick the Great the one genuine inspirer of the eighteenth century.

Yet Carlyle's kingdom was passing, and he alone knew it, though, like a frenzied man at times, he tried to believe in the Palace of Power that was going up before his eyes. To his fancy it was but a house of ice on which the south wind was already blowing, though none but he could feel the wind's direction.

In nothing is Carlyle's foresight more clearly shown than in the way he resisted the most subtle advance of the new spirit which came in the form of the Darwinian theory. To him it was always a "gorilla damnification of humanity"; yet he feared it might be true, for, naturally, it must have struck him as suitable that fools should have apes for ancestors. Yet Darwinianism, by establishing the kinship, the common ancestry, of all life-forms lays the axe at the root of all claim to this or that authority. Not Odin, but an anthropoid ape as the founder of the family? What could more surely destroy any idea of right divine, either in a King, a White Man, or any man, race, sex, or order of being? To him who looked upon great men as the thoughts of God made incarnate

it was horrible to dream that God thought through anthropoid, nay, through frog-spawn. He could not bring his mind to the great spiritual miracle which sees in every form of humble life a consciousness fundamentally as divine as it is in the species which are, in our sight, both noble and significant. That is what evolution implies : a new idea of genesis which makes all orders of creation, since they are steps in one mighty ladder, equally divine. But if we see things so, then the authority which comes from the idea of special creation is gone. Here was the point of overthrow for the whole structure of society that was going up on all sides in Carlyle's heyday. Accordingly he resisted it with all his might.

As an artist Carlyle is ruled by those marvellous senses of his : every event comes to him in scenes, every man moves in the midst of a landscape, he hears the murmur of multitudes as well as the rattle of artillery ; he feels the stirring of the blood, the blowing of the wind in the trees. Therefore he writes his histories as a picaresque novelist might do. He cannot write his *Frederick* until he has seen the battlefields, the Prussian cities. But when he has "seen," history unrolls before him like a vast forest rustling with live figures of men. His is the creative gift of the cathedral builders, fecund, imaginative, infinitely alive to the many forms of life. He sees creation coming into being in many shapes, under many guises. But really to see a Man is the aim of his work, as to hear the march of peoples is the final feat of his magic. History is to him a series of crises working to curtains in which He who rings down the curtain is none other than God Himself, for His heroes are those who make visible to the senses some conception that before was buried in the heart of the unseen.

But the qualities that come not forth into the daylight make little or no appeal to Carlyle. Thus in his *French Revolution* whatever can be visualised is molten into shape by creative fire, and some of his finest scenes are those of mass activity. Never perhaps has a tale been more gloriously told than the march of the nine thousand men of Marseilles "who knew how to die." Carlyle writes the episode like a flaming line across a smouldering page. He makes, too, a great Belshazzar feast of that Hall of the Jacobins : it is literally steeped in the strange light of the thundercloud. Equally powerful is the

description of that ever-growing efficiency in the Republican armies which was called forth by foreign enmity. As long, that is, as Carlyle can see the stage where men do things, as long as he can feel with those who suffer, he is unapproachable in power. The peoples were to him but sheep that are lost and leaderless on the hills of time. Yet he could suffer with them, could share their hunger and their rage. Nothing pierces to the heart more truly than Carlyle's vignettes of poverty; a poor seamstress, a gaunt mother suckling a starveling babe, miserable men who suffer, and great men who play the knave; these have never been painted better than he could paint them. For the creative work of the Victorian age is master of an artistic power and trenchancy which nothing in our time can equal. In the tragedy of wealth as drawn by Balzac, in the irony of history by Carlyle, in the comedy of society which Thackeray shows, in the comi-tragedy of Dickens, the scenes take place in the light and shadow of broad daylight and the personalities which sway the drama make our more analytic creations seem like figures of the moonlight and born of a dream.

It is the current of men's thoughts, the eddy of their inner passions, that Carlyle cannot truly feel or understand. Sansculottism is to him but the maddened rage of starving cattle; what Bolshevism stands for in the fancy of to-day. Of the great mystery as to how the ideals of a new world of social justice could arise from a crude outburst of passion, Carlyle can tell us little. He sees men fighting, dying, but he has no key with which to unlock those secret places where passion grows into thought and thought into ideal, under impulses that are as mysterious as the winds of heaven. Men's minds develop rapidly in times of political storm; of this growth Carlyle knows next to nothing. He gives us the facts of the emerging of the Jacobins in a series of thumb-nail sketches of their leaders; he gives us the vices of Mirabeau, his power over the mob. And that is all. Of the central fact of the whole, the crystallisation of passion into a clear scheme of political theory, Carlyle feels but little, knows but little, except that it was blown away in a whiff of grape-shot. But it was not so scattered; it was not lost; it survived, and survives to-day. Carlyle's vision failed him here because the



faculty that was required was that of reasoning true and of disregarding prejudice. Carlyle was no reasoner, but a seer. He could, like all seers, only produce reasons in support of his own faiths. It was Mill, whom he scorned, that could make his *Liberty* into a design as beautiful as a cunning problem in mathematics, and as convincing. Mill saw the Liberty that was enshrined in revolutionary hearts, however little he may have liked it. Mazzini saw a finer vision still, but to Carlyle Mazzini's theories were but "rosewater imbecilities."

The thing, the great thing, which was missed by this prophet was the thought-creation that was being accomplished behind the show of action; behind the rumbling of the tumbrils and the whiffs of grape-shot. That is, Carlyle was a typical Briton. And a Briton is never happy unless he has some definite job in hand, though he cannot be bothered to stop and inquire into the ultimate purpose of that job. He may be an empire-builder, a committeeman, or a seer, but whatever he is, to him the command "Get on with it" comes with the swing of an instinct. So with pious prayers he will join in the slave-trade, or murder by blockade, yet he will share his rations joyfully with the enemy's babies or, for the matter of that, with the enemy himself under certain circumstances. To this Englishman Carlyle says: "Upon you is laid the burden of bringing things up to standard. Therefore you must nip and prune vigorously in God's garden, doing it all in the name of the God of Law and Order. Flog niggers judiciously and use the penal code to remove from existence those retrograde beings, the criminals." So preaching, so writing, Carlyle, like a true-born Briton, goes out to buy that birthday present for his Goody that was never once forgotten by him, or to stroke Tib, the cat, and smoke a pipe with his dearly loved mother.

Only Bunyan could have painted this man. Froude, with his handy foot-rule, makes but a poor job of his portrait. For this Carlyle was a man crucified on the rood-tree of his body and mind, a soul dammed back from the activity which might have brought him health, yet held firmly to his cross whence he could see and hear the things that he hated in the present, the things to come that he feared still more. And it was this tortured being, filled from head to foot with the agony of a god's insight, who was expected to live kindly with Jane Welsh



Carlyle, a woman who, through him, had missed everything she valued—ease, society, adoration, and even self-expression.

Yet no woman of to-day could possibly pity Carlyle's wife, for did not he himself tell her before their marriage exactly what she might expect? Did he not write to her: "It is the nature of a man, if he is controlled by anything but his own reason, that he feels himself degraded and incited to rebellion and discord. It is the nature of a woman, again (for she is entirely passive, not active), to cling to the man for support and direction, to comply with his humours and feel pleasure in doing so, simply because they are his. . . ." Any woman who married after that must have known very well what fate she was bringing on herself. The women of our day cannot, indeed, be just to Jane Carlyle, for they are bound to ask why she did not find her own trade and make her own career, instead of grumbling about the washing and bread-making. She would have been better employed in cutting off Thomas's porridge and stopping those stoupfulls of castor-oil with which he tried to stay the gnawing of that rat in his stomach. Tortured beings, indeed, yet neither of them were without joy in the adders' stings that played round their visitors. See the immortal picture of Wordsworth munching raisins and finding no poet in the world as great as himself; see Macaulay, "unhappily without divine idea"; or Scott, the "grand restaurant-keeper of Europe." Only two of their friends survived those adders' stings; Emerson and Goethe. But one of these was in America, and the other in Germany, and both far away from any possibility of that fatal "dropping in" process which so upset the precarious calm of the Carlyle household.

Carlyle is an extraordinary example of the Time Spirit when it wraps a great man round in a cloak made of all the disabilities of his epoch. None realised better than Carlyle did that if he threw a stone he altered the poise of gravity itself; he knew, too, that one man's value in the sum of things is immense. Yet he threw stones; he would not estimate the value of the common man, nor allow him anything but a poor eminence in the scale of values. His century, and the spirit of it, would not let him perceive that the equality which the Revolution signified by that pathetic greeting to all and

sundry of "Citoyen, Citoyenne," denoted a human value which is divine. He could not see without disgust a time when all creatures will be regarded as the Sons of Life. Form ruled, and when consciousness began to lead him inward, Carlyle shrank back. At times he could not bear to contemplate even the visible world, so great were the possibilities of horror it might mask.

"Look up, there," said Leigh Hunt to him one day, as he pointed to the starry skies, "look at that glorious harmony that sings with infinite voices an eternal song of hope in the soul of man."

"Eh, it's a sair sicht," replied the man who had been tortured by the minute fragment of the universe with which he was acquainted.

## CHAPTER II

### GEORGE ELIOT

THERE is a peculiar irony in the fate that has befallen George Eliot's reputation. One of the greatest Englishwomen of her time, and living as she did in a period given to idealisation of its chief figures, she still awaits a worthy biographer. Even the second-rate books on her are few, while Brontë literature already fills many shelves, and the Brontë tradition shows no sign of flagging. The personality behind George Eliot's books, behind the Lewes *ménage* and the Cross marriage, has not possessed sufficient attraction to call for inquiry even in a literary world that is still excited over the internal temperature of the Pension Héger. Gossip leaves her alone in death as it did in life. The woman who was hurt because no one expressed any sense of scandal at the idea of her roaming the Continent with Herbert Spencer still remains the woman who fails to intrigue the fancy, even the rather hectic fancy of literary people. Haworth is still a place of pilgrimage, but no one inquires for the Priory, Regent's Park, where the Lewes household sent up its smoke.

Yet there is nothing in the Victorian age which is more marked than its power of creating personal legends in which we possess a reversionary interest. It was a great window-dressing period, even if the goods in the stock-rooms were seldom up to sample. What can, for instance, be more beautiful than the Arnold tradition, the Gordon legend, the Brontë drama, the Nightingale fancy? What more splendid than the solar myth of the Grand Old Man? In many respects George Eliot's character was the finest produced by this tradition-making time, her faith the truest, noblest expression of the Victorian Time Spirit: yet she remains without a legend.

There is in the popular fancy no picture of her personality such as we possess of the Inspired Governess, the Christian Schoolmaster, the Lamp-bearing Lady, or the Biblical Soldier, and the other melodramatic incarnations of the virtues. In her life there was no personal magnetism : in her death there is no dramatic value such as followed the simplest deeds of the Brontë sisters. Even when George Eliot did what would have been intensely thrilling in anyone else she produced, not a sense of excitement so much as a flash of disgust. When she flew in the face of Victorian divorce ethics, it was as if a statue had confessed to a feeling of hunger : in itself surely a dramatic position. Yet, because it was George Eliot who felt this hunger, and not the incomparable Jane or the fiery spirit from the Yorkshire parsonage, it simply registered a black mark against her name which has persisted to this day. And so the most dramatic moment of her personal life is the pathetic forgiveness extended to her by her brother Isaac when she became once more a respectable woman and could legally be called Mrs. Cross. That brother at her graveside forgiving the frailty of this glory of his family is—for the ironic gods—a fine spectacle which the Victorian propriety naturally missed.

But our generation, too, has missed it. George Eliot is one of those who “rest in unvisited graves”; about her there is little or no stir such as still centres round happier women who have been long dead.

There was a story going the rounds during the war which described how certain “red-tabs,” great military lights, were weak-minded enough to get themselves into mufti simply to escape the mockery of the London street urchins whose sense of humour at the spectacle of human pomp is greater than their spirit of reverence. The story is probably a fable, but it is a capital allegory of the gamin attitude of our cynical age towards the pomp and majesty of the time of Albert the Good. We deride that period as we deride no other : it is to us an epoch of mahogany and pretension. It seems to us an age when people simply could not be good without hypocrisy, or active without airs and graces.

Yet there is another side to the period : it was Puritan in one sense and with the defects of all Puritanism in that it



denied the thing that is for the sake of the thing that might be, perhaps ought to be. Its public drama may have been melodrama, but its esoteric creed was sterner far than anything we know in the spirit of our time. And it is this stern, unbending creed which George Eliot expresses in her life and work. Her spiritual life, outwardly so uneventful, moved among the instincts that lie at the base of the deepest life of her time. So deep, in fact, was she in that sad age, that she declared honestly that it seemed to her a mistake that she had ever been born.

Her first great book, *Adam Bede*, was published in the same year as Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and the two became the books of the year. The friend of the philosophic Brays and Hennells, the translator of Straus, the writer in the scientific *Westminster Review*, was carried at once into the great tide of physical science from which we are only now beginning to get back our breath, as it were. This tide of physical science was, of course, the first realisation in modern times of the reign of Law, and, because it worked in the realm of matter, it interpreted life, not only in terms of law, but of matter. The atom, the microbe, ruled. "You and your microbes!" says Tennyson to George Eliot. Life, human and animal, with all its queer joy and poignancy, was narrowed to a tiny sunlit space where the motes danced. All the unutterable sadness of transiency beset George Eliot. She was haunted, too, by a sense of the terrible shortness of the time in which one might do good. One must either help or hinder, leave a fruitful inheritance or one that cursed. And the time was so short. It is to her a nightmare. She could not talk simply to people, so fierce was her desire to influence them for good. This is the Puritanism that is driven by goads. There is more than a touch of fanaticism about it.

As to her creed, Frederick Myers writes this:—

"I remember how, at Cambridge, I walked with her once in the Fellows' Gardens of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May, and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-call of men—the words, God, Immortality, Duty—pronounced with terrible earnestness how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet

how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and uncompromising Law. I listened, and night fell, her grave, majestic countenance turned towards me like a sibyl's in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fate. And when we stood at length and parted, amid that columnar circuit of the forest-trees, beneath the last twilight of starless skies, I seemed to be gazing, like Titus at Jerusalem, on vacant seats and empty halls—on a sanctuary with no Presence to hallow it, and heaven left lonely of a God."

Another deeply significant quotation gives her moral application of this stern creed :—

"I am just and honest, not because I expect to live in another world, but because, having felt the pain of injustice and dishonesty towards myself, I have a fellow-feeling with other men who would suffer the same pains if I were unjust or dishonest towards them. Why should I give my neighbour short weight in this world because there is not another world in which I should have nothing to weigh out to him? I am honest because I don't like to inflict evil on others in this life, not because I am afraid of evil to myself in another. . . . In some minds the deep pathos lying in the thought of human mortality—that we are here for a little while and then vanish away; that this earthly life is all that is given to our loved ones, and to our many suffering fellow-men—lies nearer the fountains of moral emotion than the conception of extended existence."

Moral emotion it is that inspires every picture she drew of human beings, of Dolly Winthrop casting on Them Above the burden of long illnesses and of men's ways as well as of Deronda seeking Christlikeness in county families, in fanatic Jews and women of fashion, or of Nancy Lammeter measuring out the duties of life with as careful a nicety as when she adjusted the scale for butter-weighing. To George Eliot God was a dream, Immortality a lullaby to quiet babies, but by so much the more urgency must one cling to the one principle left of the great Trinity. Moral emotion then ruled her art, till finally the deductions which can be drawn

from moral emotion became the sole medium of her creative life.

It was not science alone, however, that made her this stern believer in Law. The soil for this creed was prepared even before she saw the light. It was ready in the Evans blood. No one who does not know the rural Midlands of England can have any adequate realisation of the forces which made little Mary Ann Evans. Again and again, even to-day, in moving about the farming class in Warwickshire one is aware of the ideals of the Dodson sisters as still persisting. Here conventional respectability and commercial honesty are the be-all and the end-all of existence. Of the lawless winds of the spirit that blow through West Country farm life they know nothing in these comfortable red-brick farm-houses with their walnut-trees, full garners and views over meadows and spreading woodlands. Autumn here is amazingly beautiful with its glory of earth-colours and earthy scents. One of the reasons why it is hard to conceive of the author of *Lear* as being that Stratford butcher's son is because some of us know the mettle of the pasture from which he came. This life of the Warwickshire countrywomen is not, however, hermetically sealed by a wall of feminine propriety from the sphere where people "fall": thrifty wives with gigs know a great deal about the ways of servant wenches, about the struggle to make both ends meet among curates and labourers, about the liveliness that centres round the village inn. They live a life that is "seated in the mean" in every sense, a life where the mysteries are adroitly settled by driving them, like straying cattle, into the pen of the Established Church, that convenient bureau set up by Them Above for dealing with such unchancy things. At the school of the Misses Franklin in Coventry they were very much interested in sects; Mary Ann changed hers more than once and ended up by wearing "an anti-supernatural cap." It was a strangely suitable start for the future Positivist.

Some great spirits there are who are born out of due season; they fly like petrels in the teeth of the wind. George Eliot was none of these. She lived in the habitat most suited to her nature, and out of her childish environment she created human beings as native to the English life of her time as the



heather is to the heath. Her capacity for registering impressions was second to none. She would sit in corners watching her elders, and that was the beginning of her creative life. It is a question in dispute later on as to whether George Eliot went about with a notebook and actually wrote down the sermons of her Methodist aunt, the original of Dinah, but note or no note, from the very earliest hours of her existence she was feeling people, their make-up, their twists and turns, even their inner reaction to outward stimuli. Her mother lives in her pages, her father, her brother and sister—herself—idealised, yet simplified in Maggie Tulliver—the people of the farm and the countryside. No one of her great contemporaries has surpassed George Eliot in full round pictures, not bas-reliefs, of people who were simple English of the simple English. We know that Tolstoi admired her work, and has been despised for so doing. And there is a reason for this admiration, since the maker of Anna Karenina, that supreme type of the hyper-civilised passion of cities, also created old Yeroshka of the *Cossacks*, the simple hunter, and Natasha, the girl born to be a mother, and looked towards such types as these as being, not origins to explain the past, but exemplars of what should be in the future. Of the over-sexualised city life which Tolstoi condemned there is nothing in George Eliot's pages. There is, instead, what he himself preached in more virile, outspoken fashion, the insistence on self-renunciation before the claims of race, of family, of natural religion, which every human being finds ready-made for him whenever and wherever he may be born.

This acknowledgment of claims was George Eliot's religion : it was, whenever the nineteenth century was at its best, the religion of the Victorian Age. George Eliot expressed it with entire sincerity because it was in her blood, but she followed it the more full-heartedly because she found the deep river of the intellectual life of her time flowing in the same direction as that little stream of her personal life which had its rise in the Dodson sense of responsibility. We are compassed about with a complex web from which we cannot escape : that was the refrain of the Dodson creed as well as of the *Origin of Species*. Here was Darwin speaking of the all-pervading laws by which life has evolved : on and on they



stretch into the future, these laws, as certainly, as unescapably as they ruled in the past. There was no need now of any thunder from Sinai: the law is in the blood of all created beings. Little Mary Ann had heard the same principle in a farm kitchen before she could speak. Human beings move within an iron framework of law: they may break themselves against it. And that is all the liberty they possess.

If George Eliot had not been born to work in the stuff of human nature, she would have been, not merely a sad woman, but a bitter one. From that she was saved by her love for human beings, by her love and pity for them. It is the fashion to-day to say that it is physiologically impossible for a woman to be a creator in the world of the mind. She is only the thing that bears, the passive instrument of the life-force. And confronted with the creative power of Emily Brontë or of George Sand, the retort is, "Oh, they were great lovers," meaning by that that they were, by a freak, gifted with the man's passion, and therefore with the man's Promethean power to beget in the world of the spirit. This cannot be said of George Eliot: she was not, in any sense in which we use the words now, "a great lover." Yet she loved her fellow-men as few have ever loved them. No tenderer glance than hers has ever fallen on old age and childhood, or on human beings struggling for a little sunshine ere the certain darkness fall. And it is this gift of tenderness that makes up her genius. No one, not even a Dostoevsky, has thrilled more fully with the sense of being human than George Eliot. It was this sense of sharing in their life that gave her the humour to draw the Gleggs and Pullets; to compass drama in the story of Hetty; to paint a sensuous, ease-loving nature in Tito. Yet humour, drama, sensuousness were, of all qualities, those most foreign to her nature and her creed. It is, looked at rightly, an extraordinary case of possession, this case of George Eliot, this vision of the sibylline professor of Positivism painting simple people as they are just because she loved them so well and could not paint them in any other way. She once pointed out to a friend that one of her fine, well-shaped hands was wider than the other because of the butter-making it had done. If only she could have gone on making butter: for it was with that butter-making hand that she moulded those im-

perishable figures of country life that, if England ceased to be to-morrow, would still remain among the world's inheritance of beauty.

It is the same longing for affection which explains the anomalies of her personal life. The "little wench" who used to drive about the country staring out at everything from between her father's knees could only find the protective affection which she required from a man. Woman leans on man and man on woman. "There is something strangely winning to most women in that offer of the firm arm: the help is not wanted physically at that moment, but the sense of help—the presence of strength that is outside them and yet theirs—meets a continual want of the imagination." Both Lewes and Cross met this "continual want of the imagination"; they supplied that sense of help. Observers speak more than once of Lewes's care as being "motherly" in spirit, while everyone who has gone below the surface knows that a middle-aged woman of character can, if she will, usually fill the loneliness of her personal life by the devotion of youth—and this in no gross sense at all.

Pity and tenderness toward the common lot are qualities close to the source of laughter and tears when common folk of everyday calibre are to be described, but they are neither fiery nor forceful enough to express a man in a moment of supreme conflict either with the forces within or the forces without. He passes, too, at such moments into realms where the writ of the moral law does not run. George Eliot has therefore simply no power to raise her genius to deal with human beings wrestling in strange agonies. And that is why, when she essays to show Deronda playing the Christ, or Romola struggling to be just because it is "right" to show justice, or Savonarola facing the question of sinning to retain his power, she is just seeing life in terms of problems. But life isn't a problem: it is something to be lived. And in these rare altitudes only the spirit filled with internal fires can live and endure the deadly cold. Lydgate is true because the dusty tragedy of domestic *versus* professional or even scientific duty belongs very much to this earth. Pity and tenderness are amply equipped to deal with his case. But those others, Deronda, Mordecai and Savonarola, if they are to breathe at

all, must exist in the border-world through which moves the passion of human thought. And George Eliot has no fire within to lift her to that world, though with her sad, prophetic gaze she strives to pierce the darkness.

She is different from the other great Victorian novelists in that she sensed the existence of a world of spiritual passion, a world white-hot with strange lights, a world, in fact, of rejections and acceptances far beyond the ken of any religion of humanity that depends simply on "taking thought" anxiously. But she could never reach the depths and heights which were familiar to Dostoevsky's passionate power of identifying himself with all that is human. To the maker of that cold piece of repellent perfection, *Romola*, what would *Sonia*, the harlot, have seemed in that most marvellous passage in all literature, the colloquy when the street-walker and the saint reach together a purity that no earthly stain can ever touch?

It is difficult for us to be just towards a woman whose sense of reverence, a quality in which we are decidedly lacking, was so great that she confessed to a dislike of *Alice in Wonderland* because it made fun of stories which children believe. She was driven by a terrible urge to redeem the time, to bring some help to the sad race of ephemerides. "To-morrow we die," she said always: the need was so great, the gathering of the darkness so sure. In a time when everyone was convinced that the foundations of everything, from the moral law to the constitution of the British Empire, was as fixed as the eternal hills, she shared the belief, but could find no peace in it. In an age like our own, when everything is in upheaval, when everything, including our own being, is in flux, we begin to be aware that we are spiritually made of a substance too tough to be destroyed. We feel that many modes of consciousness meet in us, the human being, that many planes of matter actually come to a focus in us. On one side of us there opens the immensity of outer nature, on the other, the fathomless depths of the world of the spirit within. We are poised so on two wings, and it is no longer a question of a God or an Immortality that is hard to conceive: it is difficult to see how there can come an end to anything which, like man, shares the awful complexity of nature and super-nature. Our case

is, philosophically, so different from George Eliot's that we are inclined to be impatient with her, to ask, Why did she not push at her prison gates and come out ?

It is an unfair question. Hers was a great nature chilled by the creeping cold of a Time Spirit whose essential quality was Fear.



### CHAPTER III

### THACKERAY

THE story of humanity is the tale of the house that Jack built. This always ends triumphantly, after the catalogue of the cat, the rat, and the other industrious creatures who did the actual work, with the shout "*This* is the man that lived in the house that Jack built." The man who did not build is therefore the crown and glory of the whole.

This view it was that prevailed in the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, when the Indian nabob, who had successfully tapped the wealth of the East, and the mill-owner who had used the brains of the inventor and the strength of the 'prentice children, were first joining forces with that third section of the elect, the landed gentry. The landlord, it is true, especially when he chanced to be a great Duke, lived in the Holy of Holies while the mill-owner was but a dweller in the Holy Place. Yet it was not impossible to cross from one realm to the other, for there existed a bridge, the bridge of marriage. And that fact it was which settled the value of the woman. The marriageable maiden learnt to say, "You must ask papa." She had excellent reasons for this diplomatic answer, since papa undoubtedly knew better than she what is the nature of a business contract.

This is the world that Thackeray painted. For his people are preoccupied with those streams of Pactolus which flowed from human labour applied to steam-power. The only difference between the serious folk and the idlers in his pages is that the former spend their time diverting the stream in their own direction, while the latter merely bathe joyously in these refreshing waters. No one in Thackeray, therefore, ever does anything by way of useful labour, except Crawley of Queen's Crawley, who breeds pigs, and Miss Honeyman, who makes

tarts and lets lodgings. And both Crawley and the lady are heartily despised for so doing. To work *coram populo* is shameful. Only vaguely in the remote background of the Newcome world the factory chimneys smoke to make their wealth, while much play is made of the Colonel's nobility inasmuch as he did not forget an old nurse and relative who was actually once a mill-girl. Ethel Newcome is regarded as a bold free-thinker because she refuses to believe that the founder of the family was barber-surgeon to a king ; she suspects that he may have been only a barber. In such a world as this, to be an artist is, of course, to be an utterly impossible person ; even a writer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* is rather common. Thackeray himself is a cosmopolitan, and therefore knows better, yet all his skill deserts him when he tries to draw J. J., the butler's son, who, as a working artist, is about as convincing as a dray-horse would be when labelled " racer."

In 1829 appeared *Pere Goriot* ; in 1846 *Vanity Fair*. These two novels are companion pictures of the society that was coming into being through the new wealth ; of the new faith in progress. Paris and London were the natural centres of this faith, the only creed that the West has actually produced : the belief in wealth ; the idea that money-making is the goal of every man's efforts ; that there can indeed be a heaven on earth ; and that the gate which opens on that Paradise is guarded by a banker. The many pages of Thackeray's long books, the scores of volumes by Balzac, are mainly concerned with the vast crowd that struggles outside the door of this earthly Kingdom of Heaven. Here old clubmen, stock-brokers, gamblers, nabobs, soldiers of fortune, merchants, courtesans, matrons and young girls jostle one another ; here and there one of them attains to the land of Heart's Desire.

It is a strange fact, however, that the two great painters of the Age of Wealth draw but shadowy outlines of that Heaven of attainment, which is not of green pastures ; both of them leave that part in Dante-esque confusion. Yet Balzac to the day of his death could not escape its bitter-sweet attraction, though he knew its illusions, while Thackeray sorrowfully confessed that he knew nothing better than the joys to be bought by wealth ; except, of course, the conventional Heaven

on the other side of death, which no one desired to look into, or to think of. He is in two minds about this wealth, for he believed that a competency would have made a decent woman of Becky, yet he shows, too, that the last agony of Colonel Newcome's poverty would have been avoided had that hero refused to touch the Bundelcund Banking Company, by which he had hoped to enrich himself. The man, says Thackeray, who puts his money on worldly prosperity is indeed backing a dark horse. But if you don't "back," you don't live. Balzac it was who realised fully that the bliss which wealth can give lies in the scrimmage outside the gate rather than in the garden on the other side. Yet the Frenchman and the Englishman are at one in this: neither of them care a tinker's curse for—the man that built the house of wealth. Even the apparent exception to this in Balzac's case, that series of studies of country life which he calls *Les Paysans*, simply proves this point. And does it in a most remarkable way. For *Les Paysans* is nothing more than a picture of how the landlords of France were robbed by peasant thieves, their lands denuded of timber, their crops sneaked under the bailiffs' eyes. There is not a line in all this to prove that Balzac realised at all who it was that tilled the crops, planted the forests and built the châteaux.

It is this view of life and labour which is being challenged in all directions at the present time. But in comparing Thackeray and Balzac we are returning to the two observers who can best analyse for us the mentality of the nations who laid the foundations of the European order of society that is founded, not on Feudalism, but on commerce and industry. For it was mainly England and France that, in the first instance, dug the entrenchments of the structure of capitalism. Balzac's Paris is a peepshow proving how the bureaucracy that was the practical outcome of the Revolution allied itself with the remnants of the feudal nobility and with the new class flung up by trade and commerce. It shows, too, how all three classes joined together to gamble with the wealth produced by the new system. In the same way Thackeray's London is the Land of Cockaigne for the soldiers and Civil Servants from India, for the nabobs, for the landed gentry like the Marquis of Steyne, and finally for the mill-owners like the Newcomes

who exploited hopeless men and weak children. You do not, however, see the exploitation ; for that you must turn to the pages of history. Over on the other side of the Channel the family of *La Cousine Bette* grew fat on *rentes*, on the salaries of office, on the sale of confiscated estates, just as in England Colonel Newcome gets his £60,000 from the Banking Company, whose sign and token is a silver cocoa-nut tree with an engraving underneath it of a plough, a loom, a bale of cotton, a Brahmin, and finally Britannia and Commerce with a cornucopia. Everything is there in that attribution of honours except—the man who ploughed, who spun and wove and built, who filled the cornucopia. It is a striking omission. From it much sprang in after-days.

But here, however, the likeness between the two writers ends, for Thackeray was English to the core and Balzac a typical Frenchman of the provinces. Temperamentally, too, the man of devouring energy who poured out *La Comédie Humaine* was at the opposite pole from the big, easygoing gentleman who was so naturally on the side of the angels, even in a world of rank and fashion.

The word “ Frenchman ” or “ Englishman ” calls up in the mind a portrait as real in its way as the picture suggested by a friend’s name. For there are actual visualisations behind these national types. And even if we say that the Frenchman stands for realism or logic, the Englishman for practicality, the German for thoroughness, or for science and music, we still see these qualities expressed respectively as a keen-eyed, eager man ; a solid fellow with an indefatigable air of responsibility ; and a bespectacled Professor. These portraits of national types are often the actual facts which clinch matters at a moment of decision. For instance, to see the Poles as “ the most untrustworthy and bellicose race in Europe,” as they have been called, or to regard them as passionate artists in the grip of brutality, may truly settle the destiny, not of the Poles only, but of all eastern Europe. In the same way the rule of Great Britain as a world-power depends in the long run, probably, on whether she succeeds in writing her own view of her personality on the minds of those she rules in Egypt and India, or whether—they evolve their own idea of that personality. In a word : is it the Englishman as he sees



himself, or the Englishman as others see him, who is going to stand for England in the eyes of the world?

The Englishman as he sees himself is reflected by Thackeray more powerfully than by any other English writer. And this fact makes his shapeless rambling books the key both to England's greatness in the past and to her danger in the future. For Thackeray's ideal human being and the standard by which he judges all things is that of the English gentleman. And this is the form, too, in which our national genius sees itself incarnating most freely and gloriously. To the England of the great tradition in which the Victorian Age believed this is our racial type-form.

It is the spiritual creation of the leisured, possessing classes, and is only extended, as a sort of hybrid breed, among the workers under the name "nature's gentleman." But a nature's gentleman is a sort of *ersatz* or substitute for the real thing. At best he has but a twang of gentlemanliness. This true Englishman it is that Thackeray loves and Balzac loathes: the difference between the two men could be well put by saying that, while the Englishman spent his time painting the portrait of gentlemen, half-gentlemen and no-gentlemen, the Frenchman spent his energy in drawing the man of sense, the man, and still more the woman, who knows what the world is made of and, most important of all, what can be made of it. And, by the irony of fact, it is precisely this kind of man, who was the ideal of Balzac the Frenchman, that the world insists on labelling "Englishman."

How does this strange contradiction come about? It lies deep buried, this contradiction, in the double nature of English personality that Thackeray has revealed as clearly as any man. He is, of course, in the direct line of inspiration from Fielding with the difference that Fielding not only belonged to a franker age, but also enjoyed the advantage of seeing it from the bench at Bow Street instead of from the club arm-chair. Parson Adams is Fielding's masterpiece in the English gentleman line, and Thackeray follows him worthily with Colonel Newcome, but, although both novelists knew perfectly well that, even in England, cads are commoner than gentlemen, it was Fielding alone who candidly painted the true nature of a cad, and, by a crowning merit, is as explicit in his

picture of the cad as he is of the gentleman. Barnes Newcome starts as the Complete Cad, but the real thing seldom beats his wife, in the class to which Barnes belongs, at least, and never ends by giving lectures on Mrs. Hemans! Thackeray's courage failed him, as Fielding's did not when he drew Amelia's husband and the lecherous rascal, Tom Jones.

But in William Dobbin, in Colonel Newcome and Henry Esmond, we have, true to the last stroke, that type of Faithful Fool whom the Englishman loves to venerate in his more solemn moments. Thackeray smiles, lovingly, at the type in Dobbin and Newcome, and Esmond smiles at himself, but the three are, none the less, different aspects of God's Englishman. And as all the men in Thackeray are judged by comparison with Dobbin, Newcome and Esmond, so are all the women tested by their likeness to Amelia Sedley, Lady Castlewood, or Ethel Newcome; all English gentlewomen accordingly to the nicely graded levels of taste which determine social rank.

In this conception of fine personality there are three leading characteristics; first, and as bedrock, a mixture of honesty and simplicity that earnestly desires to judge everything by some better test than the world's scale of values; second, a steadfastness or loyalty which cannot be changed by any shifting wind of circumstance, or, indeed, of reason; and third, the purity that in men refuses to contemplate evil too closely and in women reaches the sublime height of being ignorant of its very existence, sometimes as a fact, but always as an ideal. These are the virtues which, according to Thackeray, the Englishman not only uses when he is window-dressing, but actually when he is steering his ship of state. These are the virtues, then, that sometimes flourish even in *Vanity Fair*—simplicity, loyalty, purity. Apparently, therefore, *Vanity Fair* is a Cave of Harmony, and not a Parrot House, as we have always supposed it to be. Yet no one knew better than Thackeray how soon these flowers of beauty fade in the vitiated air of drawing-rooms and clubs; how few are the honest men and noble women. Ethel Newcome's honesty is no very wonderful thing in itself, yet it strikes one as magnificent when seen beside the corruption of her old hag of a grandmother.

It is easy to see why the race which cherishes these ideals is also the race which has created the Empire on which the

sun never sets ; why it has shown more genius for the annexation of goods, lands, chattels and ideas than any people that ever lived, not excluding the Romans. Virtue is good business when you carry it as a trade sign and not as a law in the heart.

There is in *Esmond* a passage which explains this double-faced Englishman. In a digression on the character of Marlborough, Thackeray says of him : " He was cold, calm, resolute, like fate. . . . Perhaps he would not have been the great man he was had he had a heart either for love or hatred, or pity or fear, or regret or remorse. . . . He used all men, great and small, that came near him, as his instruments alike, and took something of theirs, either some quality or some property . . . the blood of a soldier, it might be, or a jewelled hat, or a hundred thousand crowns from a king, or a portion out of a starving sentinel's three-farthings . . . taking all he could from woman or man, and having, as I have said, this of the godlike in him, that he could see a hero perish or a sparrow fall, with the same amount of sympathy for either." And then he adds with a final stroke of insight : " I think it was more from conviction than policy that the great Duke always spoke of his victories . . . as if he was a special and fatal instrument in the hands of Providence."

In these lines there is the portrait of that other Englishman whom all the world knows, he who masters the undeveloped realms, who uses the talents and powers of others for his own purposes, and does it all in the name of Divine Providence whose instrument he is ; who will take all and pray God to bless the taking : even the three-farthings from a starving sentinel or the poor strength of baby hands. To this man Heaven is always, as it was to the great Duke, " our special ally." He apparently arose, this Englishman, during the seventeenth century. Baxter, the divine, sketched the ideal of this type when he declared that the man who refuses to take the path which leads to greater profit, when that opens before him, is deliberately refusing to obey the will of God.

But men of this calibre are not the leaders of fashionable society, though they often beget them. Hobson Newcome, Barnes and all the Newcome crew simply entered into the inheritance which was made by tougher men. " The earth



hath bubbles as the water hath " ; and when the great tides of effort sweep round the world, like other tides they fling into pleasant bays and reaches such stuff as corks, scum, wreckage. This floating sea-wrack it is that pours through the clubs and drawing-rooms of Thackeray, the salons of Balzac. The two novelists may have their chosen *métier*, but they are too experienced to imagine that the bubbles on the surface of strife are those dynamic characters through whom is built a new social order.

In the background, therefore, of those worlds of Paris and London we catch brief glimpses of the causative forces. Thus, it is the Napoleonic return and its effect on 'Change that breaks old Sedley ; it is the misery of Napoleon's broken soldiers that turns the husband in *Le Lys dans la Vallée* into a dotard. Yet the main business of both Thackeray and Balzac is with the bubbles of the great tide. But in those heroic bubbles, Thackeray's good men, it is their very goodness which, by preventing them from seeing things as they are, blinds them most successfully to the evil in the structure of which they form a part. The existence of these saints, these Colonel Newcomes, these Dobbins, and Esmonds, is an apology for the state of society in which they live. These Faithful Fools are at once the unscrupulous man's tools and his apologia, his foundation stone and his whitewash. Newcome was not merely fooled by Rummun Loll ; he made his money out of a toiling India which at bottom he, of course, most courteously despised. He was rewarded with a cornucopia. Dobbin was a generous man, but when would one expect to find him inquiring into the profits of his father's grocery business or into the methods of the East India Company, both of which enabled him to be generous ? Esmond was a loyal Castlewood, but he was not in the least disturbed about the drainage or the housing of Castlewood village whence came the smallpox. We find him much more worried about the loss of Lady Castlewood's complexion. Men of simplicity are the Fools Perfect from the standpoint of the dynamic man who shapes the destiny of humanity. The man of steadfastness who says, " J'y suis, j'y reste " (Where I was, I still am), true as the pole-star to some ancient idol that a quicker intelligence would have kicked off its pedestal years ago, will never do more



than put the drag on. Men of purity, unless they have first won it by carrying themselves unspotted through all experiences, are those who walk in blinkers and can therefore be driven along any road, even to the everlasting bonfire, by the clear-sighted who sit up aloft and view the land.

These heroes of Thackeray play, in fact, the part taken by the good women of all ages : they conserve their own goodness in the midst of the pollution which they are too holy to realise. Undiluted simplicity, loyalty and purity cut the possessor of them off from that healthy cynicism which looks for a certain lacing of evil in the cup of life. The ruthless man, particularly if he is careful to assume the shining armour of religious purpose, can lead the Dobbins, the Newcomes, even the Esmonds, where he will, for they see not the evil at the root of old institutions. It was the keen, self-poised intelligence of Quaker Woolman who found, not only that there was a canker at the heart of the wealth-producing slave-trade, but that the horses were often driven to death by the mailcoach system. Dobbin or Newcome would have flogged the postboy who had overdriven a horse, but they would have left the system where they found it. These naïve gentlemen, beautiful though they are from the private standpoint of morality, are ruled, in the large, by the men who—use everything, who cut and carve, who annex and fight, who paint the personality called, by others, “Englishman” across the face of the world.

They are ruled, too, by women because their guide is affection, never intelligence or reason. Says Esmond, uttering the creed of his kind : “ ’Twas a woman that made a soldier of me, that set me intriguing afterwards ; I believe I would have spun smocks for her had she so bidden me.” Esmond, in fact, has no convictions except that the Castlewood family is adorable, so that when he stops loving his Beatrix because she is willing to be a prince’s mistress, he hasn’t the wit to see that she isn’t a whit lower than she was when she proposed to sell herself in marriage to a duke. He cannot think to the bottom of an idea : the surface is always enough for him, as it is for all these simple gentlemen who, in assigning everything to the Great First Cause, made the mistake of overlooking that secondary cause, the human will. These gentlemen of England never give a thought to the systems of life which, as

far as they are concerned, are assumed to grow by God's will. Thackeray shares their pessimism, though—in at least one respect—not their blindness. For he is so moved by the tenderness, the affection, that was the basis of his own nature, in the case of women's position that he is far ahead of his age in this respect. His bitter jibes are aimed particularly at the way society still plays the Turk, giving women over to men as slaves, denying them scope for their energies, buying and selling them as in the open market. He is the first of the moderns to realise that a woman may perhaps feel thwarted if she is prevented from using her intellect. His series of clever women are a challenge to Victorian self-complacency: there is Beatrix with her "Why am I not a man? I have ten times the brain . . ."; with her "If it be no sin in a man to covet honour, why should a woman not desire it?" There is Ethel Newcome resisting to the end the foul miasma of her family; there is Becky whom Thackeray liked so well, for all the Victorian affectation which made him end her career in a garret instead of in the odour of sanctity with a ring on her finger. It is a most lovable touch in this big, kindly man that he cannot bring himself to tell us whether Becky had actually paid the Marquis of Steyne for that thousand-pound note that caused all the bother. Balzac would have gloated over the details of the payment, but then Balzac is out for the whole truth: he has the sleuth-hound's nose for it, and this is precisely what English Thackeray cannot face. He has no belief in the possibility of reforming this sad old world, and therefore the kindest thing you can do, especially if you love women and have a respect *virginibus puerisque*, is to draw a veil of mere allusion over the darkest corners of life.

You may lie and watch the mayflies circling in that curious dance of theirs that seems so aimless and lawless. You may reflect that in Babylon, no doubt, the flies circled just as they do to-day, with the same maddeningly senseless rhythm: you may be sure that, if the sun still shines ten thousand years hence, they will be doing the same thing. It was in this temper that Thackeray watched the crowds in his Vanity Fair: they circle till comes the cold of death; unlike the flies they have mourning hatchments put up for them, but with the spring other crowds are again found dancing to the old

measures. The human mayflies dance for wealth, power, show : all over and over again.

The doctrine of the Eternal Return was not yet common as a philosophical theory, but Thackeray was a victim of it. He was—it is the characteristic of him that is most noted by his contemporaries—a lazy man, and there is nothing lazier in spirit than the view that the thing which has been, is now, and shall be, ever and ever, amen. Yet that is to him the eternal rhythm of human life. Artistically, too, every book of his making grows round him ever denser and denser, like an enchanted thicket. It closes round the lazy giant who, in the end, has hard work to cut himself out of the tangle, for he has no idea of pruning, no idea of form, and even commits the crime of dropping into family chronicle when the curtain had actually fallen with the Colonel's *Adsum*. The beauty of such work is all derived from the satisfaction people feel amidst well-cultivated, very ancient and settled landscape, or in the old observations they, like their ancestors, have made ten thousand times. It adds a cosiness to the joy of the first fire in autumn to say, "The days are closing in"; it adds a new beauty to the filmy tracery of spring to remember in this time that Chaucer also took pleasure in thinking of the small birds that sleep all night with open eyes. There is a tender sorrow in it all. Yet to some of us in certain moods this world of Thackeray's tenderness is more depressing than the fierce cold and burning heat of Balzac's Paris.

For it is the essence of this dance of the mayflies that they eternally return, not in order that they may get anywhere, but simply because they cannot escape the enchantment of eternal folly. They are interested in nothing which could conceivably be interesting to any really intelligent person. They are essentially as mad, in their desire for show, these worldlings of Thackeray, as the people in *Heartbreak House*. For all conceivable objects of desire, all conceivable objects for which men may work, could be divided into two, those that feed the sense of personal power and mastery and those that bring a feeling of identification with the universal life. To be alive is wonderful when you feel the lever of your will at work and doing its job : to be alive is still more wonderful when every moment shows the vastness of the orchestra in



which you play. This second world of joy was closed to all the Victorian world because the conception it implies of personality was not yet born. They had not learnt to see the human being with the two wings that join him to the universe, the sensual tie which roots him deep in primordial nature and the spiritual bond which opens to him the supra-sensual realm beyond Good and Evil. They had not realised this being, this complexity of the human organism. None of them could, for instance, have written that extraordinary passage in Loti's *Roman d'Un Spahi*, where the jungle sounds of the African night arouse in a man the desire that is not purely animal or purely human, but derives its power straight from the ancient darkness which bred both man and animal. Nor, again, could any Victorian have sensed the world of pure intellect as it appears in the *Karamazov Brothers*. These worlds were unknown to them, though Balzac guessed at the existence of both. But even he dared not incarnate them in the Parisian ; he shut these regions off in queer twilight tales, such as *Séraphita* and *Louis Lambert*, tales as fantastic as *Undine*.

For Thackeray, of course, this subliminal life, this supra-sensual consciousness, has no existence. He therefore makes no attempt to show the pulsing of the universal life in his people's personalities. His characters are shut up within the personal world of desire. They will fight for self and for family, as an extension of the self. Dobbin is for Amelia and for his little Jane ; the Colonel is for Clive ; Barnes is for Barnes and family. One and all, good and bad, they do not so much desire power for the zest of enjoying its exercise, but wealth, in order that they may be comfortable and feel safe. And that is why, in the long run, their world of desire is so unutterably dreary. When they have attained a dining-room with family portraits and thick curtains, they have reached their heart's desire. This sheltered world is the only possible excuse for the invention of explosive bombs.

The true inhabitant of this mahogany paradise is not the Colonel, but that most perfect creation of Thackeray, Major Pendennis, the half-gentleman who has as much kinship with Nature as those back teeth of his which his valet sometimes mislaid ; whose dexterity reaches its height when he is tracing a liaison to its source, whose most serious study is Debrett,



and who only falters in his courage once—when he inquires whether the “plucking” of Pen at Oxbridge was done publicly. Major Pendennis would have made a skilful murderer, with something easy and soothing in the poisoning line, for no one would know better than he how to show that delicate discrimination after the event which evades the hangman’s noose. For of all the people ever born he would be least concerned with that aspect of murder which has nothing whatever to do with being “found out.”

Major Pendennis it is who reconciles us to the harsh and bitter air of Balzac’s Paris: it nips, it burns, it is pestilential at times. But it is, after all, the world of fighting men and eager women who are at any rate convinced that they are getting—somewhere. And a race is more amusing than an eternal merry-go-round. Nor do they feel it necessary to be incessantly practising the miracle described by Professor Keynes of proving that, since they so strongly will what is good, it is impossible that anything which they have done can be bad. Instead, they assume a vice and wear it proudly in the face of all men.

It is hard to say what virtue Balzac valued most: probably it was family duty, especially in the matter of providing a nest. He gets near to a study of moral duty in that strange book *La Recherche de l’Absolu*. There Claes spends night and day and all his resources on one of the quests that ennoble humanity—the search for the “absolute,” the elements in chemistry. Claes poises himself on one of those gossamer threads across the darkness which his divine unrest forces man to fling into the void. Claes is a great man: Balzac is great because, notwithstanding the narrow self-satisfaction of the age in which he lived, he can create a Claes. But the chemist loses his children’s patrimony, brings his family to poverty, and finally has to sell his plate, his hangings, to feed the furnaces of his research. And Balzac blames him. Nothing in these novels of Paris at the opening of the capitalist age throws more light on the psychology of the time than this fact: that virtue consists, in the eyes of a first-class observer of men’s motives, in keeping your silver and gold—and letting the knowledge go. For this knowledge is abstract. Yet none knew better than Balzac himself the glory of the lonely quest

for the absolute, the uncreated, the visionary. Yet he puts business prudence first.

Thackeray, though he never touches such high problems, though he was the last man in the world to force his will to enter those transcendental worlds which Balzac once or twice beheld from the mount of vision, though he has no notion, as Balzac sometimes had, of the complex nature of man, does yet create above the tawdry spectacle of Vanity Fair an atmosphere of serene purity—that abides. The qualities of simplicity, loyalty and childlikeness may be misused, even made the occasions of tyranny and crime, but without them the noblest wisdom, the most brilliant intelligence, would be powerless to rebuild the world and build it better. At any rate, it is before the shrines of simplicity, loyalty and purity that the Englishman burns incense, though his active service is paid to other gods.

Thackeray's knowledge of both types of Englishman is still quite unsurpassed.

## CHAPTER IV

### TROLLOPE

£68,939 17s. 5d. : it is with this grand total that Anthony Trollope sums up the result of his literary labours. He records to a penny the amounts received for each of his books, noting also the pleasing detail, Sundries, £7,800. His commentary on the whole is : " I look upon the result as comfortable, but not splendid." Had he written his own epitaph, it would have run thus : " A fortune of £70,000 made by fiction, with a happy life thrown in."

The opinion was expressed by George Gissing that the publication of Trollope's *Autobiography* put an end to his popularity, so ruthlessly did it destroy all romantic illusions as to the novelist's inspiration and his purpose in writing. But the plain truth is that the *Autobiography* merely shows how methodically Trollope worked ; that he went as regularly to his desk as a busy tradesman goes to his shop, and that he wrote novels mainly to enable him to get even with the kind of society which despises everything except riches. But this truth-telling by no means invalidates the other facts ; first, that however methodically Trollope might work, he was often moved by genuine inspiration, and, second, that he never condescended to the mean—and customary—way of making money out of other people's bodies and brains, since he exploited nothing except his own creative powers.

Trollope was in some ways a great man—great, that is, from the standpoint of the practical world. He was convinced that every tub should stand on its own bottom, that every man, if he wanted wealth, should make it out of himself, after the fashion of the spider with its web. This conviction assuredly provides some claim to greatness.

Horror of the sufferings which are brought by poverty was the motive-power of Trollope's energetic, successful life. This horror is the great psychological fact of his childhood ; it did for his nature what solitude did for Balzac and art for Goethe ; it supplied the keynote of his existence. " I was a sizar," he says, " in a fashionable school. The indignities I endured are not to be described. It seems to me that all hands were turned against me, those of masters as well as of boys. I was allowed to join in no plays. I might have been known at a hundred yards' distance by my boots and trousers—and was conscious at all times that I was so known. Something of the disgrace of my schooldays has clung to me all through life." From those days at Harrow Trollope's one desire was to be popular and to be loved ; in his daydreams he saw himself as a clever man who was loved by fair women. All that " the world " has to give he wanted ; this he determined to win, not by business, but by the creative imagination, and when in later years this aforetime pariah of Harrow was admitted to society, having earned his entry, he says : " The Garrick Club was the first assemblage of men at which I felt myself to be popular." At this time, too, he lived in a desirable mansion at Waltham Cross, where " we grew our own cabbages and strawberries, made our own butter and killed our own pigs." The little boy with the shabby trousers had made good, gaining for himself all that the average man would like to have ; his income at this time, so he tells us, averaged £4,000 a year, of which he spent two-thirds and put by one.

Those who maintain that the system of free competition brings out a man's best energies should certainly use Trollope's *Autobiography* as a textbook in their propaganda. But they should not fail to note that humiliation and poverty are not enough : the aspirant must also be provided with an exemplar ; with one who has, as it were, blazed the trail in advance. This exemplar Trollope found, of course, in his mother, Frances Trollope, who had reached the age of fifty before the goad of want forced her to use her mental energies. Then, with a dying husband and children on her hands, she started to write, producing one hundred and fourteen volumes before she died. " The doctor's vials and the ink-bottle held equal places in my mother's rooms," says Anthony. She would start her



novel-writing at four o'clock in the morning, getting through her literary task for the day before the rest of the world was awake. In this way the heroic, jovial woman kept the wolf of need at bay, working in the midst of bitter, heartbreaking sorrow. Her son, who could write under almost any kind of hindering circumstance, when travelling or in the throes of sea-sickness, says: "Her power of dividing herself into two parts—and keeping her intellect clear by itself for the work it had to do—I never saw equalled." This power, with the drive of will that accompanied it, was her supreme gift to her son.

When he became a clerk in the General Post Office, Anthony had still to battle with poverty. In London he was always in debt, always on the verge of being dismissed, and it was not until he got the post of Surveyor's Clerk in Ireland that he at length began to grasp his nettle. A curious question arises here as to what it was that changed this youth, turning him into a man of great accomplishment, both in the public service as well as in literature. Was it the established position, with its salary, or was it Ireland that wrought this miracle?

Both probably contributed to the happy result, for if you put a lad of spirit to a job which not only pays him, but also sets him moving briskly along the highways and byways of a new country, there is quite a good chance of his finding out that the regular delivery of the goods of achievement, with the man and the hour and the task coming aptly together, is the chief satisfaction of everyday life. That, at any rate, was the discovery which was made by the young Trollope, and in Ireland.

In that country the young man came in contact with a national temperament diametrically opposite to his own. For of the two classes into which all men may be divided, those who live for the day's work, for the shaping of the world that is into the world that may be, and those who live, as James Stephens puts it, "inside their own heads," knowing as little as possible of that "hungry" place, the real world, Trollope belonged to the former, and the majority of the Irish to the latter. But contact with those who live, like Peer Gynt, on the products of the fancy often has the effect of driving a practical man to rely on his own horse sense. It must be

confessed, however, that Trollope's Irish novels tell us little about the Irish people except that he liked them. His Irish squires are never racy of their soil, nor indeed of any soil in particular.

The question of the sources of Trollope's inspiration is an interesting one. For, although he lived much in the world, going into business circles in pursuit of his work for the Post Office and into social life for the sake of its pleasures, as an artist he only came into his kingdom when he was dealing with the clergymen of the Church of England. As portraits his masterpieces are, of course, Bishop and Mrs. Proudie, Archdeacon Grantley, Mr. Harding, Warden of Hiram's Hospital, the group of folks at Framley Parsonage, and—greatest of all—the perpetual curate of Hogglegstock, the Rev. Josiah Crawley. These personalities are not only alive as human beings, but they are also important clues to a comprehension of the place of the Victorian Age in the criticism of life.

Yet, as Trollope himself tells us, these characters were not the fruits of observation, but rather of that sense of certainty which comes to a man when he is dealing with the stuff of his own nature and being. Trollope's churchmen, then, were evolved from his own instinctive kinship with the realities of English life. The truth of this is proved as much by failure as by success. For in the case of the Bishop and Archdeacon, Trollope is amazingly successful, while with the Dean he fails. Dean Arabin comes into several novels, and his deeds and words are described in many pages: he is a life-size portrait as to shape, but he remains a shadow. Now the three pillars on which the Church is supported are the Bishop, to whom is given the cure of souls; the Archdeacon, who has the care of finance; and the Dean, to whom is entrusted the nobility and antiquity of the Cathedral. This Trinity of power is the English version of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. But, as one would expect, Trollope's most fully realised character is that of the Archdeacon who stands for finance, or the Truth; with the Dean he fails, for was not Beauty outside Trollope's province? As a highly moral man he could realise the Proudies in their effort at "uplift," but it was when he came to money, to the Archdeacon, that he touched the thing which truly roused his enthusiasm. The Archdeacon is a man known

to the deepest fibre of his being. Yet of him Trollope says : " I never lived in any Cathedral City, never knew anything of any Cathedral Close, and at that time (of the Archdeacon's creation) had enjoyed no peculiar intimacy with any clergyman. My Archdeacon was the simple result of an effort of my moral consciousness. It was such that an Archdeacon should be—and lo ! an Archdeacon was produced." The spirit of a man has its own homing instinct : when it comes to the question of inspiration this is the fundamental truth.

When Trollope stood that summer evening on the bridge at Salisbury, when he looked down on the Cathedral and considered the question of what ought to be done in modern times with the endowments left by pious men to succeeding ages and so fell upon the tale of Hiram's Hospital, with the disposal of money as the crux of the novel, not only did the Archdeacon spring fully armed, from his brain, but the genius of the English race found its artistic expression. For that genius lives in the joyful hope that one day it will have learnt how to make the best of both worlds. These Churchmen of the " County of Barsetshire " are living types of England's main preoccupation, its concern for the equitable distribution of wealth. It may honestly be said that, if ever the world does solve this question of wealth distribution, it will be the English who have worked hardest to find the way. Trollope records in his Barchester series just how far they had reached in Victorian England towards it. He shows how the rival interests of the soul and of wealth were actually balanced in the Church of his day. As he puts it : " All material intercourse between man and man must be regulated by weights and measures, and as we of all people depend most on such material intercourse, our weights and measures are a source of never-ending concern." This concern it was that ruled the Archdeacon's life, yet—and that is the triumph of Trollope's picture—it did not make him less of a man, for it did not destroy his true kindness of heart.

The subtlety of the portrait of Archdeacon Grantley is shown in the contrast between his conduct in personal life where a matter of money is not at issue and his behaviour whenever any attack is made on the possessions of himself or his relatives. In his fierce desire that his father-in-law, Mr.



Harding, shall hold on to the eight hundred a year which comes to him from Hiram's Hospital, he loses, not only his Christianity, but his gentlemanliness. When the bedesmen have sent in a petition for a larger share in the proceeds of Hiram's estate, this is how the Archdeacon addresses them: "When John Hiram built a hospital for worn-out old men, worn-out old labouring men, infirm old men past their work, cripples, blind, bedridden, and such-like, do you think he meant to make gentlemen of them? Do you think John Hiram intended to give a hundred a year to old single men, who earned perhaps two shillings or half a crown a day for themselves and families in the best of their time? No, my men, I'll tell you what John Hiram meant; he meant that twelve poor old worn-out labourers, men who could no longer support themselves, who had no friends to support them, who must starve and perish miserably if not protected by the hand of charity; he meant that twelve such men as these should come in here in their poverty and wretchedness, and find within these walls shelter and food before their death, and a little leisure to make their peace with God."

So does Archdeacon Grantley, in *The Warden*, give vent to his contempt for poverty and humble station. He is in a rage, and it is not merely *in vino* that the truth is shown. Yet he is not mean, but generous, especially to his own, but his idea of the way to use wealth is to employ it to advance one's station in life. Hence the triumph of the ineffable Griselda when she becomes a Duchess. Yet, although he opposes his son's marriage with Grace Crawley on account of her poverty and obscurity, in that great passage where he yields to Grace's charm and purity, he rings true. For he is a man, if not quite a gentleman, and in the important matter of a woman can distinguish gold from dross. Did he not marry the humble Warden's daughter? And does he not bow his proud neck before her remarkable knowledge of his strength and weakness?

But the Archdeacon's quality is shown more clearly in the affair of the Rev. Josiah Crawley than anywhere else. Crawley is the touchstone by which may be tried the whole theory of wealth which was upheld by that most English institution of Trollope's time, the Church.



In a worldly sense the perpetual curate of Hogglegstock is a dead failure ; in the spiritual sense, he is a saint. There is no man in Trollope's pages who is worthy, either in point of character or scholarship, to black Mr. Crawley's boots. His learning is of such a quality that he takes a pure joy in reading the classic dramatists in the original tongues ; he is, besides, a humble follower of his Lord ; not only is he diligent in attending the sick and dying, but he will turn an old woman's mangle for her and go out of his way to carry a bundle for an overloaded boy. He has missed success by his refusal to make any compromise with evil, as well as by his inability to conform in any way to the fashion of this world. He rebukes sin like a prophet, and talks like one in ecclesiastical libraries and drawing-rooms. His saintliness fails him, however, in one respect : he grudges other men their wealth and ease, even their well-bound books. His wife has to deceive him when she takes secretly into his house those " eleemosynary " gifts of pork, butter and eggs, yea, even of mince-pies at Christmas time. The bitterness of his worldly failure eats into the man's very soul : it poisons every relationship in his life, yet, when the timid, time-serving, henpecked Bishop tries to rob him of his office illegally, Crawley shows himself to be a strong defender of his right to the cure of souls. The pages of *The Last Chronicle of Barset* are made splendid by Trollope's insight into the nature of this strange man, when he shows him sacrificed, even tortured, before the world's god, Money. Being charged with stealing a cheque because he cannot remember how it fell into his hands, the half-crazed wretch is dragged before the magistrates, is made the subject of an ecclesiastical inquiry, and finally almost ousted from his parish duties.

This story is apparently concerned with the testing of Mr. Crawley ; and right shrewdly does it test him, to be sure. But a more important man is also weighed in the balance and finally proved to be wanting. Archdeacon Grantley comes miserably out of the trial.

The Archdeacon's true business in life is to find the right way of dealing with money. When he is at work on this task he is plainly in his element : he exerts himself with all the zest in the world. But Mr. Crawley's trouble is money, and money

alone ; when he is faced with a moral problem, or a question of the soul, he is better able to deal with it than any cleric in Bassetshire. If Mr. Crawley could only have been given an adequate income with which to pay his butcher and his baker, he would be in all respects a man of power. Nobody knows this better than Archdeacon Grantley, yet he and all his circle of influential magnates stand round Mr. Crawley as he writhes and agonises, just for all the world as though they were a set of doctors who refused to attempt to cure a sick man or to end his agonies by a timely injection. It is a ridiculous spectacle of helpless imbecility. These men, this Grantley set, had plenty of patronage at their fingers' ends ; they could have saved Mr. Crawley, but they would not, simply because he did not conform to the conventions of respectable Bassetshire society. He was uncouth and ill-tempered ; he rebuked sin wherever he found it, even if it was in the Bishop's palace, and could not be induced to take a hand at whist. In short, he was an impossible person, impossible socially and clerically. And probably the poor brickmakers' wives at Hogg's End would have agreed with the verdict of their richer neighbours, for what must a busy housewife think of a man who insists on reading the Bible to her before she has finished her washing ? No, in the depths as well as in the heights Mr. Crawley is a laughing-stock, a bore, and, at the same time, an interest in life. The drawing-rooms and tap-rooms in Barchester and its environs would have been far duller without the fascinating subject of Mr. Crawley's sorrows and sins. And the Archdeacon, like many of his neighbours, would have missed a certain savour that made his day's work more enjoyable had Mr. Crawley been a man of manners and of competent means.

This fact does not exempt the Archdeacon from blame, for in his own province of finance he shows himself to be inefficient, short-sighted, and incapable. For it is more than possible that Mr. Crawley's peculiarities were bred by misery, and that, if he had been given preferment he would have proved himself to be such a shining light in his calling that much honour would have redounded, through him, to the Church he served. But Trollope's verdict is clear : only one kind of man succeeds, either in the Church or out of it ; that is the man of mediocre talents, who possesses a pliable back

and an eye to the main chance. The day of the saints is over, and the churchmen's views are no higher than the laymen's as to the just or wise distribution of this world's goods. The Archdeacon's rule is, like that of the world, that he shall keep who can, and from the man who does not seek wealth shall be taken even that small modicum of it which would keep his body and soul together.

It is curious to compare the scathing realism of this conclusion with the fanciful picture of Church efficiency as painted by Balzac in *Le Curé de Village*. The French pastor in that novel is set up by his creator to show what he calls *l'évangile en action*. The remorse that the country parson evokes in the heart of the erring Lady of the Manor is simply a means to that agricultural revival of a desolate district which can only be achieved by the help of science and economics. Accordingly, through the curé's influence, engineers and geologists, doctors and accountants, are summoned to the great estate. They divert watercourses, make lakes, and generally force the desert to blossom as the rose, to the infinite benefit of the happy peasants. Here is the Church as a master of industry, using its power to produce economic results. Mr. Crawley would have had no more idea of how to set about this task than he had of how to provide for five people on an income that was not enough for one. But Mr. Crawley is a human, suffering, contrary man, a being taken all hot from Nature's crucible. Balzac's curé is a Force, but not a man at all, except when he is in the cell by the side of the condemned murderer, agonising with him, leading him to God. Then, indeed, he is a man—and very much like Mr. Crawley when that poor parson knelt by the bedside of the dying. Confronted with the French curé as he went about his business of reclaiming the unproductive land, the Archdeacon would, no doubt, have improved the occasion by a homily on the folly of a celibate clergy. For if the good priest had only been the father of a family he would have known better than to allow all the revenues of the estate he had saved to be wasted on peasants. There would have been a Griselda or two in need of dowries. The prosperity of the English countryside is, thank God, in no such desperate state that it requires fanatics to administer it.



“ Much church, but more love-making ” : such is Trollope’s description of his novels. Yet the love-making is merely an accompaniment to the main *motif*, that of getting on in life. In his pages women never pull the strings, though Miss Dunstable’s money gives her the appearance of doing so ; and when Mrs. Proudie tries to rule, we all know what she makes of the business. The Bishopess of Barchester is evidently regarded by her creator as a warning to women, but she is rather a lesson to men—not to cut women out of the practical business of life. For if you condemn a powerful woman to the mere job of keeping a palace dusted, you run the risk of creating a gorgon. Seen in this light, however much the connection might horrify her, it is clear that Mrs. Proudie and Becky Sharpe had something in common. Both being shut out of the exercise of direct power, resorted to underground ways, though the one became a termagant and the other a courtesan. But Mrs. Proudie, at any rate, had a more just idea than the Bishop of what should be done with Church revenues, for did she not show a woman’s heart when the feeding of the Quiverfull children was in question ? Mrs. Proudie has never had justice done to her, for although she certainly muddled her husband’s affairs, that was merely because she enjoyed power without responsibility. He should have frankly made her his partner. She is just a *maitresse femme*, English variety ; and how much less objectionable is it to persecute a husband than to play the courtesan to elderly dotards according to the practice of the Balzacian *maitresse femme*.

The beautiful and tender picture of Mr. Harding’s old age, of his sad visits to his fiddle when failing powers forbid him to play it, must not blind Trollope’s readers to the fact that this man’s life is a story of the terrible inefficiency of the good and gentle. The Archdeacon is bold and strong, and wrong with money ; the Warden is kind and forbearing, but weak with money, as with everything else. Trollope’s Church is just an organisation for putting men in charge of money who are incapable of using it either wisely or unselfishly. And if *The Way of All Flesh* is an analysis of the inner failure of official Christianity, then the Barsetshire novels form companion pictures of the outward failure. Butler’s indictment is savage



and Trollope's humorous and urbane, but none the less deadly. One is certain that the Archdeacon never preached on the text "Let him that hath two coats . . ."

Yet Trollope never meant his picture to be a judgment, for of his four conclusions on life, "that good pictures, elegant drawing-rooms, well-got-up books, Majolica and Dresden china are the truest guards to protect youth from dissipation and immorality," that there are places in life which can only be filled by gentlemen; that it is a mistake to suppose a man is the better for despising money; and that the society of the wealthy and distinguished is almost always worth cultivating, every one of them would have delighted Archdeacon Grantley.

That fact is indeed the secret of the success of Trollope's picture of the Church of his time, for he shared its views and regarded the order of society which had evolved it as a success.

## CHAPTER V

### DICKENS.

THE vitality of the art of Charles Dickens has never been better exemplified than in the fact of his popularity in Russia, where his novels are not only read but dramatised. And to those of us who have never heard the vast laughter of Russia because we read Tolstoi and neglect Gogol, this is a surprise. For, with the possible exception of Fielding, Dickens is the most English of all our novelists, and the Englishman with his instinct for the limits of the actual is, in more ways than one, the antithesis of the Russian with his lively sense of the infinite variety of the possible.

Yet in a Europe where the feeling of hopelessness is even worse than the chaos, the emergence of Dickens in any country must needs be an occasion for thankfulness. For in the Western world to-day, where the failure of one form of civilisation is apparent and where the shape of the new structure is as yet but dimly haunting the minds of men, a twofold doubt has arisen to paralyse confident action, a doubt on the one hand of the power of man's brain to conceive, and on the other, a far worse doubt of the power of man's heart to quicken into life that which the mind can construct. When we want thinkers and lovers we are given nothing more helpful than mere politicians, of whose futilities Dickens himself wrote when he was a Parliamentary reporter. "Night after night," he says, "I record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify."

In such a time as this it is the robust lover of the common man who can help us to satisfy at least one half of our doubt, and that the more serious one, our distrust of the quickening capacity of the heart.

Dickens was no builder of the New Jerusalem: when he saw the evils of society he merely regarded them as excrescences which could be planed away, for he had little notion that the foundations were unsound. But in him what we find is the common man, the being who moves between the two poles of tears and laughter, whose best creed is kindness, whose actual "good works" are the filling of the hungry with good things. If we can truly believe in that man as fundamentally existent in the people, however deep-buried he may be, we can still look forward with a certain confidence to the future. For, after all, the stimulus to creative thought is just the desire of the heart; and out of the travail of the people will inevitably come the thinker, as out of the heart of the people will come the power to translate that thinker's thought into action. From the people must come the whole driving force of change: from the people or not at all. And at the base of all the struggle between Socialism, capitalism, communism, it is the heart of humanity that is stirring like a mole at the foundations of a mountain. The mole is very active; the mountain very heavy; but it is wiser to regard the activity of the mole than to brood over the weight of the mountain.

Although Dickens cared little for the great contests of politics and science, he was a master born late in time of that great form of popular art which, ever since the dawn of civilisation, has created vast mythical personalities, greater than human, yet made of human characteristics. These figures by their simple structure, as well as by their size and vigour, produce reflex actions in the smaller men who begot them and who yet imitate them.

This simplicity is not the fashion of to-day, of course, nor was it, in fact, the style of Dickens's contemporaries, who counted themselves the more successful in proportion as they approximated to the subtlety and contradiction of the actual human being. The novelists of the Victorian Age applied their powers especially to the complexity of the social picture, while the novelist of to-day mainly devotes himself to the complexes of a single human being, yet what the Victorian said of the social scheme, which was "curiouser and curiouser"! is still said by the modern in his researches into personality. What they both have to say of human nature is, indeed, "How

strange!" where Dickens's verdict is "How jolly!"—jolly because lovable. For just as from the simple "archaism" of Greek art there emerged the idea of beauty, so that now the word "beauty" is written for ever across our idea of the human body, so from the archaism, the broad simplicity, of Dickens there is built up for us the idea of the loveliness of the simple human creature.

Dickens's art, as Mr. Chesterton has said, is in tone, for all its humour, with the epic power of those creators of character who gave us the man of cunning in Ulysses, the man of war in Hector. Not that Dickens is the first of the humorists in this kind; for where is laughter deeper than in Pantagruel, or more mordant than in Don Quixote? But we do not at first see this kinship of Dickens with the epic—first, because he flung off the tradition of aristocratic distance, making his god at one moment a man with a paunch, at another a drunken sot; and second, because he was not as single-minded as the ancients were and often bowed before strange altars, at one moment creating a picture of industrial conditions as in *Hard Times*, at another trying his hand at mystery stories, such as *Edwin Drood*. His great creations are, however, mountainous; yet because they are not far off, not veiled in the mists of antiquity, but rise at our very doors, so that we can trace the contours of their surface, we are puzzled. They seem familiar and yet strange. They are not quite men and yet they possess some qualities that are more lifelike than the men we meet in the street. We realise that the smile on the face of Mr. Pecksniff may be an archaic one, but, all the same, it is a smile of human quality, since Pecksniff is not, like a figure in a mystery play, mere hypocrisy personified. He is a human being, and yet greater than any human being because compounded of human nature's quintessence of hypocrisy. Mr. Pickwick, again, is not simply a jolly old fool who is seeking adventures along with a comic servant, but a being whose genial essence is compounded of every creature's fun and frolic. There never was a Pickwick or a Pecksniff, though nearly every human being carries within him the soul of a Pecksniff like a shrunken bladder which but waits for the inspiring breath of circumstance to inflate it, while most of us have had, at one time, enough animal spirits to enable us to enjoy tumbling out of a



wheelbarrow. In these characters we see our powers writ large ; we say not, "There, but for the grace of God, go I," but rather, "There, thanks be to the power of dream, I go." Ay, even Pecksniff, or the mean rascal, Sampson Brass.

These beings are ourselves, but ourselves grown monstrous, like gigantic gourds, in the quick forcing-house of genius. The strange fact is that we can rejoice in them all, in the rogues and fools as well as in those kindly lovers of their fellow-men who are usually regarded as proofs of Dickens's good heart. If, for instance, we were in a sort of mental shipwreck with the dream figures of the Cheerybles and of Pecksniff and Brass all struggling on a raft, we should certainly hesitate as to which had better be sacrificed. For Dickens simply could not hate any being he had created. And neither can we ; for has he not breathed into every Galatea of his the breath of his own soul ? That dog which followed Sikes, always nameless as befits such an eerie being, is an elf brought from the realms of the Comic Spirit to connect even Sikes to something of love and pity. Jabez Chuzzlewit is a cur, but once, like any other young man, he preferred youth and freshness to mean ugliness. Even the Chuzzlewit selfishness never sears the heart as it would have done in Balzac's hands. For the lust and meanness of *La Cousine Bette* has no spark of laughter in it ; and the air of that terrible house of the Marneffes carries with it the miasma of the plague ; but the plague is in Balzac's own heart.

The power of laughter is so strange and puzzling, even to the good people, that nearly every religion leaves it to pine outside on the doorstep of the temple of worship. But Dickens, mighty lover of man as he is, shows it reigning in the very heart of all men, and there, even in the most evil, keeping a spot of sweet sanity. It is the talisman of his power, this laughter, and the moment he drops it, as in the churchyard broodings of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, he is lost in a sea of bathos.

In Dickens's sight, man is so irresistibly comic that he can never stand on his dignity even with himself. And is it not this "standing on one's dignity"—that is, on one's own interior conviction that one is not "as other men are"—that makes Englishmen and Irishmen fly at one another's throats, Poles

hate Russians, and Frenchmen and Germans face each other across hostile frontiers? Laughter, as Dickens understood it, makes it absurd for one man, one nation, to scorn another man, another nation. This hot breath of Cain, this scorn of others, can be cured, perhaps, only by the solvent of one tremendous whiff of laughter, not grape-shot.

Dickens's great figures are instinct with the humour that finds all men lovable because all men are laughable—all men without exception. All men are, therefore, equal. There is not one that is before or after other. His colossal figures, alive and Homeric in power, offer a challenge to the spirit of malignant ill-will that turns life into a hell. Yet this wholesome laughter, found in pictures as far apart as the pride of Sir Leicester Dedlock and the cringing fear of a Fagin, is a personal gift of Dickens's own spirit; it is the atmospheric sea in which are islanded the creatures of his genius. Without the genial wine of Dickens's own nature it would be hard not to hate creatures so absurd, so like ourselves. The weakness of our meaner natures must be recharged from the power-house of Dickens's heart.

It is Dickens's perception of the spirit of Christ which comes in to give beauty and power to his personal temper and to his great gift of laughter. For the most important fact about any great writer is not what creed did he profess, but rather on what assumption did he habitually think and act. And Dickens's own assumption is quite clear; behind all his characters, born as they are of the people and understood of the people, there is another figure, vaster and more tender: it is that of Jesus. The Jesus of Dickens is born of the people, like all his creations. It is this Jesus who receives the outcast Jo when that waggon, his breath, grew so hard to draw. For Dickens's Christ is the "gentle Jesus" of the children's hymn, the Jesus of pity. Dickens knew nothing, simple man that he was, of Jesus the rebel, nothing of the "Red Christ," nothing of Epstein's supreme scorner of human folly, nothing, again, of Renan's poetic figure. Yet no one, not even Renan, is more steeped in the Christ spirit than Charles Dickens. His conception of the Man of Nazareth is like a mould into which he pours all the flowing lava of his power; it gave him an appreciation of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity that far surpassed

the ideas of the revolutionary leaders. For in Christ, as Dickens understood Him, all are brothers, all are free and equal. This is the equality of the spirit.

Class is, therefore, a barrier which Dickens finds it easy to overleap. And it is this power that gives to *Bleak House* its great value, for in this book class after class of English life is reflected, each with its own peculiar merit, its own peculiar qualities. The medium of Dickens's own good will it is that supplies the clear, pellucid atmosphere through which so many sections of society can be seen. Even where Dickens deals with evil, as in the Law's delays, he makes a monstrous figure of human ineptitude, a personality of outrageous power under whose mighty shadow crowds of petty men do crouch and shiver. He takes a sort of pleasure even in the vast ramifications of this coiled snake, this hooded death. There is no trace of bitterness towards any man ; only the bitterness which one may feel against Fate. Out of human folly is born the imbecility of the Law, or of the Penal System ; it rises like a fog, this imbecility, and all men breathe heavily in it. Bitterness, therefore, even against the Chancery Court, is absurd.

A curious exception to this attitude on Dickens's part of tolerance towards men of all kinds, even when they do wrong, is shown in his feeling towards the temperance movement. There is a certain acidity even in the uproarious buffoonery of the scene with Stiggins at the meeting. And we know from the pages of *Household Words* that Dickens was bitterly opposed to teetotalism, a curious trait in the character of a man who painted the gin-drinking of low London in indelible colours. Yet half the humour of *Pickwick* would be gone if the cold punch scenes were omitted. Dickens could see nothing, in fact, except wine that maketh glad the heart, simply because he found in the genial virtue of good-fellowship the quickest road to kindness. Dickens believed in being at home with all men, and therefore, if spirits and water could do the trick of making people feel at home, then spirits and water must be all right. Therefore he creates a special crew of sour-visaged hypocrites, such as the Chadbands and Stigginses, to express the folly that was connected with this matter. And after all, these precious creatures are more absurd because they have earned red noses and other unlovely attributes than



because they profess a piety which would vastly become them if only they possessed it.

But this temper of being at home with all men makes Dickens also more at home with the democratic spirit than any of his contemporaries. He cared nothing for economics and still less for the origin of classes. Yet it is among the working class that he finds most human-kindness and among simple people the finest instances of love and sacrifice. And now that the destinies of the race are passing, to all appearances, into the hands of the people themselves, it is refreshing indeed to read Dickens's evidence as to the excellence of the human stuff. Over and over again, with an almost childlike delight, he brings forward, like a man searching in the gutter, gems of divine pity and goodness from the poor things of the world. There is Mr. Toots, the fool, who is also the true lover; there are the working women, from George's mother, the house-keeper in *Bleak House*, to Mrs. Bagnet, the old campaigner who is always washing greens; there are Susan and Polly who alone bring something of wholesomeness into the stagnant air of the Dombey household. There is Miss Pross whose love stands triumphant in the shadow of the guillotine. Finally, there is the eating of Bob Cratchit's goose, one of the many hundreds of scenes where mere meat and drink is turned into a divine Sacrament of human love.

It is among the people, of course, that Dickens finds the true meaning of the meal called the Lord's Supper, for in plain fact it is only the poor and needy who can realise the significance of that sharing of food. And from Dickens one sees why the Founder of Christianity made the breaking of bread the symbol of brotherhood.

For probably the whole problem of this life is nothing more than the sharing of bread and of all that bread stands for, so that it is simply the truth that neither warring states nor struggling men will find peace until they have attained to the spirit in which Bob Cratchit cut up his Christmas goose; in which Swiveller brewed purl for that kitchen-drudge, the Marchioness. In a spiritual sense, Dickens's verdict is once more the old one: "the rich thou hast sent empty away." For it is among the simpletons that Dickens finds his instances of the charity which not only shares bread, but performs the



greater miracle of thinking no evil. There is no other creator, not even Dostoevsky himself, who cares as little as Dickens for the shows of things and all that we call "appearance."

Of the two obstacles which hinder humanity, the one, hatred, racial, religious and social, and the other, the lust to possess, the temperament of Dickens finds neither invincible. To the question which so many of us ask: How can I find my brother lovable, when he seems to me to be hateful? Dickens replies: If you can find him laughable without even the touch of contempt which some people profess to find in all laughter, then you have solved that riddle of existence. And because Dickens accomplished this miracle himself, he is a tremendously valuable object-lesson.

His answer to the other evil, of greed, is less helpful, because he falls into the pitfall of all preachers, and exhorts. "Be generous!" cries he. But if you are not cast in generous mould, how are you to perform this miracle? It somehow seems as futile as to try to grow turnips—with no turnip seed.

The passion to possess, though it is judged now by many to be the very tap-root of misery and wrong, has only recently come into the zone of conscious thought because its world-wide sway as a motive has only recently been recognised. We are beginning to see that, before we can tackle this evil, and truly be able to break bread with all mankind, we shall have to do more than merely alter the entire system of production and distribution; we shall have somehow to work the miracle of bringing about that Third Kingdom in which the lion of individualism will lie down with the lamb, collectivism. About this, Ibsen has more to say than Dickens. For when the Victorian appeals to genial love and mere free-handedness to solve this hideous problem, we feel that he is like one going about with a bottle of rose-water in time of plague. What we need, however, from science, from thought, is a method which will at last give a chance of action to Dickens's spirit of good will. And without the spirit all the science in the world will be useless. The sole difference between ourselves and Dickens is that we know how deep the roots of this cancer go, and he did not.

There could, however, be no real undervaluation of the importance of wise "possession" in any clear-sighted son of

John Dickens, *alias* Micawber. That son would surely be bound to realise the misery which reckless "free-handedness" can bring on a family. For Dickens approached the question of poverty from an unusual angle: he had experienced what those who are actually born in poverty perhaps seldom feel; that is, its shame. The most curious passage in the autobiographical work of Dickens is his description of the pains he took to prevent his poor colleagues in the blacking warehouse from learning that his father was in a debtor's prison.

For this agony of shame was the sequel to that gay childhood in Rochester, where in the cheerful family circle the little Charley said his "pieces" to the delight, at any rate, of himself and his parents. We sense the atmosphere of cosy parlours well-wadded with sandbags against draughts, with plenty of punch in "flowing bowls" and children's parties galore, all set against a background of frequent play-going at the old Theatre Royal, Rochester. This social gaiety accompanies Dickens all his days, and from that time onward there is no opportunity in his life for any withdrawal from the world. He was before the footlights all the time, his flame of genius fed from the start to the close by the pressure of people, of ever and ever greater crowds till the wheel had come full-circle in the wave of excitement created in England and America by those "readings" which killed him. His characters are born of the breath of the people and inspired by the ideals they found most attractive. In this world of feeling, to be a father who left his family well provided for was to succeed; but to show oneself generous was also a joyous exercise of power. The Cheerybles, and Scrooge after conversion, are superb crystallisations of old English life. For to the good Englishman of this school, philanthropy is more than a hobby, it is the way, not only to Heaven, but to a heightened appetite for both getting and spending. There is no place whatever in this scheme of existence for any conception of a form of life which will make both getting and spending things of the past.

Dickens, in fact, like most men of his age, had no idea that the causes of evil might lie elsewhere than in the human heart. He would fain make men generous and loving, because he was himself a generous lover of his kind. He, therefore, sees all men getting themselves ready for the Kingdom of Heaven one

by one. He has no idea at all that the thinker who burrows at the very roots of the system of wealth-production may possibly be more effective in inducing a Heaven on earth than any lover or preacher. When Dickens, therefore, wanted an evil removed, he showed how people suffered under it : *Oliver Twist* made the Poor Law hideous enough, God knows, but yet the Poor Law still remains, and only social reconstruction will remove it. In the same way, he went down to Manchester and wrote a tale about hard-faced men like Gradgrind, and thereby produced about as much effect on the industrial system as would be produced on an elephant by an urchin who threw a cherry-stone at it.

For Dickens had no idea that the foundations of society are rotten and, therefore, when he treated such evils as factory conditions, which are part and parcel of the system, his work was necessarily futile. But when he was dealing with the evil whose roots lie deep in the history of man he was more than futile ; he was afraid. Consequently he is hysterical in face of sexual evil. Here all his humour, all his large and tolerant way of regarding life, completely deserts him and he produces the ridiculous Carker scenes in *Dombey and Son*, the pitiful sentimentality of the Little Em'ly motif in *David Copperfield*, the highfalutin of the Nancy episodes in *Oliver Twist*. The same excitement crops up in his own marital troubles, and in face of gossip he actually proposes to win the public over to his side by publishing a defence of himself.

His century, in fact, was one which lived splendidly by dint of wearing a company face and company airs on all occasions. It was in this way an age of repression and, in a way, of hypocrisy ; often the hypocrisy was no worse than that shown by a man or woman who goes to a wedding with a smiling face—and an aching heart. But because Dickens was most sensitive to misery, he could neither treat sexual wretchedness lightly nor could he leave it alone ; it touched the quick in him and he had no science at hand through which he could calm his nerves. He wrote a pamphlet addressed to the women of the streets which was actually distributed in London ; he worked as the agent of the Baroness Burdett Coutts in her efforts for fallen women, but he remained oblivious to the fact that prostitution has its roots in the economic and



political position of women, and never lost an opportunity of deriding Mrs. Jellyby and her kind. Dickens in his views of women is indeed a curious instance of the fact that men judge women mainly by those whom they have known in early youth, for, although in later life he knew the Baroness Burdett Coutts and must, therefore, have realised the importance of women's public work, yet his most distinctive portraits of women are of scolds, of pretty fools, who even cry, like Kate Nickleby, "Unhand me, sir," when in a tight place, of jealous termagants and of women whose goodness is about on a par with their silliness.

The strength and the weakness of Dickens is the strength and weakness of the Englishman whose capacity for satisfactory living rests on his fine faculty for dealing with other men "as man to man." But when Englishmen have to face a new synthesis, a new vision in an unexpected quarter, they behave, if not stupidly, at any rate with extreme timidity. They do not take naturally, like more volatile nations, to the idea of "beginning all over again." It is significant in this connection to note that there is not a single great English creative artist in the Victorian time to be found among the iconoclasts whose blows were aimed, long before the Great War, at the structure of society which led to that cataclysm.

It is indeed the contradiction between the English kindness to individuals and the English indifference to bad systems which has done more than anything else to earn for us the title of "English hypocrites." The hypocrisy is not due to a moral squint, but rather to the fact that the English heart and the English brain have never yet succeeded in running in double harness comfortably, for one is the hare and the other the tortoise. And against this weakness Dickens, thoroughbred Englishman as he is, has no remedy; his vision is of the Christ who wept over Jerusalem, not at all of the Christ whose true message was, "Behold! I make all things new." When Dickens attacked hypocrisy, he confined himself to oleaginous small fry, such as red-nosed preachers, and Women's Rights women, whose children were left unwashed. For the great hypocrisies of greed and ambition, for exploitation in class and sex, he has no weapon of attack. And many of us who have learnt from him to be kind to individuals habitually support



systems which cause more suffering than all the individual selfishness in the world.

Dickens's mind was utterly free from that peculiar blasphemy which imagines that a hell upon earth is to be maintained as a school for training candidates for a Heaven somewhere else, but he could not see that his desires for human well-being could never be attained until yet another of our "little systems" had passed away and ceased to be. Both by temperament and training he was pre-eminently one of those to whom the lighted patch of consciousness in this life was enough: there is no background to his thought derived either from history or science. Above all, to his thinking there is no mystery engulfing the human lot. Only his view of death has just a touch of strangeness about it, for death is to him but a going out with the tide, with the tide of the great sea.

Absolutely the only point that pulls him up in the neat completeness of his view of existence is the wrong and suffering in the world. Is it not surprising, he asks naïvely, that, since the heart of the people is full of love and laughter, things should go so far wrong?

It is just this that we have been trying to explain ever since Dickens died; the whole of our social and political science is, in fact, an attempt to grasp this very difficulty. We say that we have gone wrong mainly because we have not thought straight. Dickens said that we have not loved enough, been generous and genial enough to one another. And so he builds for us in his stories a garrison against evil, a world apart, with red blinds in the windows on a winter's night, with stores of food within, with great roaring fires, and hams and bowls of punch. Once inside this room of his, it is a pure pleasure even to see the fog drift in from the river when, for a second, the door is opened. Inside, we are so jolly and open-hearted and so frankly full of animal spirits. It is, this Dickens-land, the Kingdom of Cockaigne, where roasted birds do not exactly fall into people's mouths, but where, on certain days, good souls go out into the highways and there distribute to all men geese, turkeys and sausages, whole strings of them. The fog is a pleasure, because it heightens the joy of the fire; poverty is a happiness, because you can relieve it. Such, at bottom, is

Dickens's cure for evil. We have to get over it ; we have to master it.

We say the same to-day perhaps, but with this difference : that we would fain clear away the fog by consuming our own smoke and would arrange a method of roasting birds that would fit them for everybody's mouth.

But the heart of Dickens's message is that neither bright fires nor large turkeys for all will avail without the treasure of the heart ; without that joy in giving and serving which made up the very spirit of Dickens himself. That will outlast many systems, for without it all systems are useless.

## CHAPTER VI

### TENNYSON

A CONVERSATION worth overhearing would be one between Tennyson and Rabelais, for, since the talk must needs take place in Heaven, Tennyson would surely have sloughed his Victorianism and become the homely man he was not suffered by his times to be. The august English shade, then, still dignified in looks, but oblivious of how he used to stand on the Victorian mahogany over against the portrait of the great Queen, would be but a racy countryman, happy in breathing upland air, the man that wrote the *Northern Cobbler*, *Rizpah*, and *Ulysses*. Thus at last himself, he could sit at ease cheek by jowl with Rabelais, to whom man was but a goatlike, two-legged animal—with possibilities.

The two would talk of the possibilities. For, though the Frenchman was in life the freest of free spirits and the Englishman lived rigidly within the framework of his century, there was in both the sense of readiness for far horizons. Each of them, having a soul built for a long journey, could subscribe to the faith of Ulysses :—

“ Yet all experience is an arch wherethro’  
Gleams that untravell’d world, whose margin fades  
For ever and for ever when I move.  
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish’d, not to shine in use,  
As tho’ to breathe were life. Life piled on life  
Were all too little . . . ”

This is the essential Tennyson, a man of heroic temper, one willing “ to follow knowledge like a sinking star, beyond the utmost bound of human thought.” It is this Tennyson who, facing the iron laws of the science of his day, forces them to

yield some pledge of good for mankind. In this life, however, he lived trammelled by the chains of half-truth : it is good to dream of him as living, freed at length from the last shred of dogma, pushing on beyond the sunset. He was, as Dean Inge has said, the greatest of the Victorians, for, during a period which had lost the sense of adventure, he still could think in terms of æonian time.

The English shine best in the first freshness of a prosperity that has been won by hard struggle. Other races seem to reach the supreme expression of personality in times of suffering : out of the torture of tyranny there once rose a revolutionary France that was clear-eyed ; out of the tortured Russian heart there has often risen a passionate idealism. But England is never greater than when in lavish giving she pours forth out of her abundance. And when generosity fails, then is she bankrupt of all virtues. We hate being poor : in our true virtues there is a scorn of small things. We hate small meals, small means, small gains. Our finest time was when our dinner-sets were gargantuan, our cellars cavernous ; or when, in another mood, we took all the seas for our province. Throughout such a time lived Tennyson, in the sunshine of that period when the possibilities of industrial wealth seemed endless. His inspiration was as rounded and perfect as a poet's well could be, for the ideal of his time and of his own life was that of the true-born Englishman who takes his stand on what he has ; who cannot conceive of himself as going forth naked, possessing nothing but his soul, to prove what stuff he is made of.

In their greater moments most poets inhabit a world beyond the frontiers of earth, a land unmapped by any earthly topographer. Flooding the cold dawn of classic beauty with Renaissance splendour Keats creates a region beyond the possibilities of corporeal habitation ; the spirit of Shelley can trace the very winds of the spirit to their starting-point, but for Tennyson an English meadow is enough and England's story all the subject he requires. More : the England he knows is only one out of the many Englands that have been. For never was a man less touched by the chivalry of the simple England of the *Morte d'Arthur* than is the creator of the blameless king.



Tennyson's reward for this absorption in the common scene was that, when he spoke, men understood him, those men of his own time who fought the Crimean War, disputed over rotten boroughs, perfected the party system and believed in models for the people, in strong simple patterns of virtue who could be imitated by the smaller fry. In the smooth lines of his noble face, so unlike the ravaged features of Francis Thompson or the glowing fire of Shelley's, one may read the lineaments of a triumphant age when success seemed to follow effort as surely as day follows night.

For a time, that is. Yet, when the age shows promise of its end, Tennyson, great mirror as he is, begins to show wavering reflections that are full of doubt. He is like a man who, after peering into the hidden depths of a lake that is fed by secret springs, catches unaware the vision of shifting sands at bottom. His later poems, therefore, are like faint prophecies of this century of disenchantment, when all the consolation available for us who live in it is that "he that is down need fear no fall."

It is natural that in certain moods we should hate the triumphant Tennyson. For we feel like urchins pushing our faces against the gate that shuts off some pleasant garden. Desirable fruits are there and lawns for tired feet. But, since we ourselves are shut out of this paradise, we call the people within by hard names. Smug they seem and hypocritical because they ought to have known—what we know about their foundations. In our rage we sometimes strip ourselves of our poor rags of virtues, showing our sores like beggars at the gate.

Yet in other moods we turn with longing eyes towards this self-satisfied England with all its traditions of cleanliness and courage. We even rejoice in its suppressions, in its "short way" with subtleties. In such a temper of mind we would give all the wine of modernity for one draught of Victorian ale. The Victorian achievement, its cities with main drainage and a good water supply, its perambulating policemen and organised output, seems sometimes as fine as any that human skill has compassed. From the dryness of our political desert we turn thankfully to think of rich tilth and richer looms. We want to look at something done; at something we can handle, touch, or see. For our century is cursed by a strange paradox

of fate : in scientific thought we see before us unknown paths leading probably to splendid goals ; yet in the world of morals we are beggared even of honesty. On the one hand we face the awful menace of the heights of human effort ; on the other we seem utterly unable to drag ourselves free of the slime-pit of evil. What we crave for is a broad highway through the lowlands of common life.

Tennyson walked through these lowlands of life, and on them met the common man, took him by the hand and showed him the unsuspected loveliness of many a common thing. In no other way could the vision of beauty have been brought home to Everyman. For Tennyson stands side by side with his reader, making no attempt to drag him up the mountain gorges of the empyrean.

This power possessed by Tennyson of speaking so that the common man could understand him was a faculty he shared with the great writers of his time. It appears nowadays to be a lost gift, for the works of our creative writers will be on the shelf of history, documents of a time that has passed, before the mass of the people begin to realise their existence. But Tennyson and his contemporaries ignore the twilight, the borderland, of consciousness ; their broad noon shines on Everyman's delight in wife and children, in founding something out in the light of day, a nation or a family ; in grappling, not with blind Fate, but with a careful Providence that rewards effort. His landscape, therefore, is not the plain beyond the ether, nor the mountain-tops where are born the storm-wind and the lightning flash. Instead of these he knows the colour of ash-buds and how the yew-tree steams in pollen-bearing time. His most popular poem, *Enoch Arden*, is a tragedy of marriage where the cares of a general shop and the business of selling fish are the humble instruments of catastrophe. His primal simplicities are those of the nuptial couch and well-filled nursery. The homeliness of earth is his true inspiration, and what he sees in motherhood is the primitive motherhood of the flesh that woman shares with the cub-carrying beast : it is the " bone of my bone " of Rizpah. What he sees in his countryman is the shrewd hand at money-making : Tennyson's farmer could stand in the corn-market alongside of Chaucer's miller with the thumb.

This man, who in another age might have proved himself in clear line of descent from Crabbe, is born in a country rectory with its reticence, its decency and reservations. Here he finds cultured leisure, free from hot-gossiping, with family music and a general readiness to greet him as that divine being, a poet. At the University, with its mixture of Plato and saucer-baths, of noble thinking and simple living, his stature and handsome face, his goodness and simplicity, make him at once at home with the class that feels itself born for "the top drawer." He never gets drunk, nor did he leave a love-child in a wicked Continental city. Propriety, like cleanliness, is an essential part of the man's dignity. He is then meet for the high sanctities of the court of Victoria and Albert, but he has to suffer some plain speaking at times from Fitzgerald.

This background of temperament and circumstance prepared him for the arithmetical view of human life. For those who look thoughtfully at the condition of society can be divided into two classes: first, those who keep a credit and debit account of the total good and evil, and secondly, those who refuse the comfort of any sort of total and concentrate on the misery of the exceptional people. The first, the arithmetical class, lays stress on the fact that existence is probably tolerable for the majority and is, it may plausibly be maintained, growing pleasanter day by day. Certainly, having regard to the enormous increase of the population under modern industry, there must needs be in existence a greater sum total of human happiness than in earlier ages, even if we must also insert in our ledger a greater sum of human misery. This was, at any rate, the instinctive view taken by the Victorians, and was natural enough, since they lived by pouring out commodities and breeding men in bulk. During the greater part of his life Tennyson shared this spirit of congratulation: the gain won by the general struggle is his subject.

To modern critics this seems a strangely ungenerous attitude for a poet. For poets are not supposed to do sums. They are expected, perhaps unreasonably, to revolt against satisfaction, to concentrate all their fire on the woe of the odd man out. How dare they, like Tennyson, take pleasure in the comfort of hall and farm while the leaders of the starving peasantry are being imprisoned and transported?



So it may seem to-day. But Tennyson in his youth undoubtedly found pleasure in sum totals, disregarding the wastage of the human scrap-heap, avoiding, too, the shifting bottom on which were built the faith and the accomplishment of his time. But as he grew older, the other, the non-arithmetical, temper began to invade his heart. Passionate revolt flames along his soul. But still he is not wholly true to it. He flings out the fire of it truly, but always most passionately from the lips of a degenerate and neurotic youth. The protesting voice sounds in *Locksley Hall* and *Maud*. It is not that of a man fired by social wrong, but of one who is merely querulous through an unhappy love affair, as though Shelley had learnt his generous wrath—because Harriet Westbrook proved a disappointment.

What then was the actual faith of this great Victorian ?

He trusted in commerce to bless the race ; he believed in war for cooling medicine against fever ; he thought the world could be saved by the example of great men ; he trusted—for a time—in sexual purity, of the one man one maid type, to bring in the golden age. His religion was the most honest thing about him, because in it at least he tried to face things out, to get to the bottom of them. In other matters he usually took ready-made conclusions, but in regard to Carlyle's " gorilla damnification of humanity," evolution, Tennyson took pains to get down to the bedrock facts as they appeared to the science of his day. And this religion was the only thing that stood by him to the end. He had learnt before he died that " honour sinks where commerce long prevails " ; that the race of good great men seems in the upshot to be like a river lost in a sandbank ; that in sex there is something diabolic which is not to be exorcised by holy water or by all the rounded sentences of the marriage service. In its confession of dead failure the *Idylls of the King* is one of the most extraordinary books in any language. And that battle of Lost Innocence, in which every man's honesty is submerged as by a tidal wave of lust, is the cynical summary of life that might have fallen from the lips of Rabelais.

But over all the wreck one star still shines : it is the belief in that circumstantial evolution of man by countless ages of selection which, as Bernard Shaw declares, makes one's heart



sink. One man's meat : another man's poison, of course. Or is it not, with us, that those who have long had to content themselves with husks do undoubtedly rejoice in the idea of a good wheaten loaf ?

But, like the brave soul he is, Tennyson makes the best of his husks. With a thrill of elation he looks back over the ages of change through which our globe has passed and we along with it. In these he sees plainly the hands "that reach through Nature, moulding man." The ultimate destruction of the earth does not dismay him, for

" The hills are shadows, and they flow  
From form to form, and nothing stands,  
But in my spirit will I dwell."

For Tennyson, matter exists but as a channel through which the soul of man may come to full being. When that consummation is attained, then will humanity spurn the reeling world that served it—and escape. In the dizzy sense of incessant, age-long change he glories, looking forward to the vast promise of the immeasurably distant future. Tennyson's is built indeed for a long journey. When mankind is being tortured here and now, he calmly asks :—

" Ah, what will our children be,  
The men of a hundred thousand, a million summers away ? "

But what of the children now in factory towns ? What of the children now in city slums ?

They must wait. Meanwhile Tennyson lived in a garden paradise. Therefore he can smoothly rise to a supreme confession of faith :—

" Man as yet is being made, and ere the crowning Age of ages  
Shall not æon after æon pass and touch him into shape ? "

The smooth metre echoes the rhythm of the ages till we seem to sit among the Immortals, sharing the glory of their eternal day, their sublime indifference to tears and blood and twisted heart-strings.

It is this faith which makes the heart of Shaw sink within him. Why is this ?

Is it not that, where Tennyson sees only the result, Shaw's eye is on the method? Is it not, too, that we have a phrase "to deliver the goods"? We want the goods delivered a bit sooner than "æons away." The total may be grand, but we want some of it now.

A glorious promise is enough for Tennyson. The comfort of it stays his soul even in the midst of a sense of general failure. Faced as he was at the end with a vision of the prevailing commercial dishonesty, with immorality and weakness, he rises on his strong wings and soars into the empyrean, guiding himself by the compass of the Darwinian principle.

The methods implied, the survival of the fittest by arbitrament of battle; the destruction of the weak; the awful blindness, as far as man is concerned, of the whole process: these he accepts gladly. For he takes only a bird's-eye view, and, so looking down, is like a man watching a bull-fight from the clouds. The bloody details escape him, and at such a distance it is possible to believe that the matador is merely bracing his courage, not feeding his lusts.

But Shaw, with the rest of us, is down in the dust of the arena itself. We are the matadors. We have seen the battle of the "fittest" fought out on a gigantic human scale. And after looking at the results we can only feel that the celestial machinery of destruction will surely catch us up before we become a spiritually minded race, and that, at this rate, the earth will be a dead world like the moon long before man is "made," if the job is to be left to the slow unwinding of the chapter of accidents.

No; the will of man has to take a hand now. And because of the change in thought during the last half-century we are able to imagine how this can be done. First, we see all life as Will, the blind sex-will simply to come into the flesh. We see how, from amœba to man, this blind Will has been seeking expression. And that Will is becoming concentrated in dimly felt purpose. Like the other senses, it is apparently shaping an organ for its expression. If we go backwards into the first whirl of the ether, we see the action of a hidden Will; if we look forward to "the last relay and ultimate outpost of eternity," we see the same Will becoming self-conscious.

This view of destiny was closed to Tennyson. Yet he, in

the dawn of the religion of evolution, felt the glory of its promise, and, thrusting back the doubts, struck the first note in the modern Hymn of Creation. He, of course, looks rather towards the Great Scheme as a schoolmaster at the opening of term may regard the time-table. But we, on our side, have torn up the time-table and taken to the road. Our Song of Honour has the old authentic note of adventure about it. We are the new Elizabethans. We, like they, are out for "great surprises" on the chartless seas.

Tennyson could know nothing of this change of spirit, and so his last poems reflect the grave distrust in all things that ended the great Victorian epoch. Here, as always, he is the mirror of national life.

In his reverence for the past, in his lack of joy at the prospect of beginning everything over again, he is not only English, but even womanly. It is the woman's passion for the sad sorrow of the past that inspires his most perfect song, "Tears, idle tears." In that lyric there is the sense of mystery that is so rare in Tennyson; it is the woman's mystery of remembrance, of that divine despair that comes

"In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more."

Tennyson's true position as a poet is decided by this crucial test of mystery. The spirit of great poetry is remote from this earth, belonging to another order of being. It comes down, or comes up, like an echo from a world invisible to our noon-day. In this respect it shares the quality of certain rare dreams which live for ever in our memory because they shine in the light of another glory than the mere solar ray. There are beauty and terror in these dreams, as there are in the colour of the sea-depths in Leonardo's Madonna of the Rocks. This mystery it is that transforms the past, creating out of death and decay the beauty of the Celtic twilight, the grace of the classic world of form, and out of bereavement and loss the marmoreal dignity of the great funeral songs, *Lycidas* and *Adonais*.

*In Memoriam* lacks this power, all human as it is. The light of the whole poem is that of common day: there is scarcely a line in it in which the everyday man would not

find reflected some mood of his own. Even the hymn to the "Strong Son of God" is no more than a vague aspiration after an anthropomorphic Saviour. The atmosphere of the whole is one long search for consolation, for some buttress against the shock of death. There is in it personal grief, the close touching of human affection. But no one's grief was ever soothed by *Adonais* or *Lycidas*. We only realise the true power of these great odes of death when we see that the child who died this hour now shares the majesty of those who passed ten thousand years ago. And in this thought there is elation, but no comfort. In *Adonais*, instinct as it is with the awe of mortality, there lives in immortal form the strangeness of a thousand partings, the wonder of a million graves. In *Lycidas* there survives, also snatched from death, the ineffable beauty of the dead world of Paganism. A man, or a world, dies and death has no sting, since beauty is born of death. In both *Adonais* and *Lycidas* whatsoever is mortal does truly put on immortality.

But in *In Memoriam* we turn our back on this heroic coldness. There is no triumph in the Victorian song of death, only that restless search for consolation which sounds like a wandering night wind. Tennyson is concerned with the purely human question, Is death extinction for my friend? Or, in another mode, Is all our hope for the future only hope for the race, and not for me? Granted that "the transmutations of the Holy Ghost are infinite," shall I share in them all? If I, in my body and mind, sum up the way the race has travelled, so that every nine-month conception is a miracle of the world made flesh, shall I not somehow continue to summarise the long process of evolution? That is the problem which *In Memoriam* seeks to solve. The mourner asks for such comfort as the spiritualist can give him.

Tennyson halts between two solutions. For his lost friend is at once indistinguishably merged in all that is and yet appears at moments as an individual who is able to make his presence felt. Tennyson is a modern who tries to make the best of both worlds. By so much is he less of a poet. It is with earthly pain that he stains the fair radiance of his spirit's greatness. Like his age, he is earth-bound.

But if in his theory of death Tennyson is earth-bound, so



is he, too, in his conception of life and its ordering. Men, in his thought, were divided into two classes, the mob and the heaven-sent leaders. These leaders, standing out above the crowd, would draw towards them the simple eyes of the base multitude, who, gazing always on their tutelary Saints, would at last grow like them. From brutes, these crowds would become men.

This theory was, of course, actually put into practice, and the Gladstonian Liberal was, for instance, a man stamped into a typical form not so much by a creed as by a personality of commanding strength. And certainly Albert the Good left something embedded in English life besides a generation of men now known by his name.

To rejoice in the failure of this scheme is rather devilish, for, after all, we are sadly in need of a short cut to the millennium. And in view of this theory of social evolution, Tennyson's horror when he saw practical men turning from the task of politics to follow the "wandering fires" of ascetic mysticism is perfectly comprehensible. St. Teresa would have been a dead failure if the mystic vision had prevented her from looking after the daily duties of her nuns. But it did not do so, and, in refusing to reckon with the power of the practical mystic, Tennyson, with his age, goes far astray.

For life is an affair purely of balance: the life of the flesh itself is nothing more than an advance along a knife-edge, a tight-rope, with a gulf either side. It can only be accomplished safely by those two wings, those two floats, of mind and spirit. Nor is this only true of the individual; for the history of the race itself is the story of its wing-development, of its sublimation of the passions into the motive-forces of mind and spirit. The consummation towards which Tennyson sees us moving needs the spiritual purity of Sir Galahad no less than the sword of Arthur, the rough-hewer of the social forms. If organised society is ever to approach the perfection of the Celestial City we shall need the inspiration of angels rather than that of soldiers and diplomats. The latter, in fact, have had far too long a run for their money. But Tennyson compromises: he will not follow ideas to the end where they become purely ideal. As before in his view of immortality, so he is earth-bound also in politics. His mistake is far more disastrous than Shelley's,

who never forswore his allegiance to that intellectual beauty to which he had vowed his youth.

Tennyson never actually grasped the fact that man can live in other worlds than the tax-paying one: that the world of the mind is as "real" to a Newton, the world of the soul to a St. Francis, as the one in which Tennyson's father's rectory was situated. The "divine event to which the whole creation moves" means something more than an orderly earth without war, vice, or disease. It means immeasurable powers of mind and soul in the inhabitants of it, for "we do not know what thoughts are thinkable by man." But the savage who learns to count up to four is in the long chain of conquest: he is as essential as Einstein. He is, when he is mastering a step in the mental evolution of the race, as important as the tribal chief who brings rough order where chaos reigned. But in Tennyson's view the order is everything; only when the good husbands and fathers, the far-seeing kings and crafty soldiers, have done their work will it be time for humanity to sprout into Galahads and develop the wisdom of Merlin.

It is a strange conclusion for a poet, this horror of asceticism, this denial of dedication to the supreme conquest which is the defiance of the world of the senses. Yet it is pure Victorian, and that *Holy Grail* of the *Idylls* is one of the most typical fragments in our literature. In its simplicity of thought, in the rolling music of its metre, it forms a companion picture to Balzac's *La Recherche de l'Absolu*, where the philosopher who seeks the secret of matter is blamed because he failed to found a family. The noble Englishman and the cynical Frenchman bear much the same testimony to the character of the ideals which came into being in the industrial age.

And yet Tennyson refuses to leave the matter here, for, with an instinct for the truth that is strange in one whose effort was to put a fair face on the human scene, the *Idylls* end in failure, in the loss of all that had been won through hard-fought ages. And if the first foe is asceticism, the second is sensuality, lust rampant. It is a curious spectacle, this fall of the Table Round in Tennyson. The Victorians feared sex so much that they drove it as far as possible underground. But, like all hidden evil, it had its revenge. And so Tennyson's dream of

a fair and noble society is broken up by the rabble rout of a nature that has been scorned and denied.

It is not merely the pessimism of the later years of the century that leads to this avowal. It is that under the suavely melodious singer of this age there is to be found a much greater man, a stormy spirit who is not content with the smooth thought of mere advance from precedent to precedent. And this greater Tennyson rises, once and again, above the iron laws of that day's science, above the formalism of its moral code into a realm where—one may dare to face the truth and tell it.

To the poet, the maker, all things are but one : life, death, pain, joy, evil, and good are all on one level to him, for they are but material which he uses to create a world that is truly transcendental. The *Cenci* takes a crime of the slums and makes of this *motif* an incarnate image of power and beauty. This wonder-working is, in effect, a philosophy, the supreme philosophy that a god might use who wove the complete expression of divinity out of fire from hell as well as light from Heaven. But Tennyson's sense of responsibility to the values of earth is too great to allow him to visit hell in search of copy. His prudence, the prudence of a commercial age, forbids him to trust his soul to any rainbow bridge across the gulf of existence. Is it not mad, he asks, to neglect a good estate on earth for a mere promise of the heavenly mansions ?

He is, in fact, no child ; he cannot, therefore, see himself as a king of infinite space. At bottom what he sees is mechanism in the universe, a mechanism that carries us on-wards and upwards, yet by physical means. But the poet's breath of life comes to him from the metaphysical region, and the more closely Tennyson reflects his period, with its faith in a cast-iron system, the less of a poet is he.

Yet in the end it is Tennyson the truth-teller who emerges—to destroy, if not to build. The spiritual quest and the lust of life break up the ordered round of duty at Arthur's court. It is impossible for man to live in the narrow compass of a self-chosen sphere. Sooner or later, the spell breaks and the other worlds, the metaphysical worlds, intrude. It is the strange intrusion of these worlds that makes the close of the *Idylls* so pathetic. In the "death-white mist" all things

break in pieces in Arthur's kingdom. So they had in Tennyson's thought of his age and time. At the end of his life the gorgeous palaces of Victorian confidence vanished at a breath.

A universe of surprises is ours once more.



*PART IV*  
THOSE WHO ESCAPED

CHAPTER I.—CHARLOTTE AND EMILY BRONTË

CHAPTER II.—BROWNING

CHAPTER III.—MEREDITH



## CHAPTER I

### CHARLOTTE AND EMILY BRONTË

IN December 1848, when Emily Brontë was dead and Anne dying, the famous *Quarterly Review* article declared that the author of *Jane Eyre* must needs be a woman cast out from among the respectable of her sex. In 1922 a French critic writes: "Avant tout, les sœurs Brontë furent femmes, et femmes non satisfaites. Leur génie servit principalement dans l'histoire du roman anglais à introduire, à manifester, à imposer, en dépit du scandale, la toute-puissance de l'instinct sexuel, source de toute nature et de toute vie."

Sexual surfeit or sexual starvation: one diagnosis or the other has always been regarded as the true explanation of the Brontë genius. Vice was the key in 1848, but in 1922, when the sun of psycho-analysis has dawned on the world, enforced virginity is the one preferred. Those literary daughters of debate, the Brontës, therefore, suffer as much to-day from the torchlight of science as they did in their own time from the turnip-candle of a narrow-minded puritanism.

The current view of the Brontë sisters ignores many of the superficial facts of their position. For, while they were certainly instinct with passion and ignorant of the sensual expression of it, much of their creative fire is expended in trying to claim for women something better than the position of poor relations at the table of life. They will not only to love, but to work; to contact life in all possible ways. Thus many pages of *Shirley* discuss the contention that woman is as capable as man in the affairs of reason. It is, too, into the lips of Shirley herself that Charlotte puts an analysis of class-hatred: "I cannot forget," says she, "either day or night, that these embittered feelings of the poor against the rich have been generated in suffering: they would neither hate nor envy

us if they did not deem us so much happier than ourselves." This is as far removed from the industrial theories of Hannah More as it is from the feminism of Dr. Fordyce, who described women as not merely "beauteous innocents," but—more beatifically still—as "the fairest images of heaven here below." But with the Woman kneeling on Stilbro' Moor, the Brontë audacity carries the claim of equality up to the Olympian regions of creative effort. That Woman-Titan speaks face to face with God; and of her it is written "that Eve is Jehovah's daughter as Adam was his son." This Woman is assuredly as free as the Spirit in *Faust* who works on the loom of Time the living mantle of God; she is certainly born neither of baffled desire nor of fear. Yet at the mere sight of her the critics, like Caroline Helston, find it time to hurry into church—or into the laboratory.

From that Woman-Titan we pass in *Shirley* to lower levels; to the statement that the virtuous woman was a manufacturer who made linen and sold it; was an agriculturist and bought estates. From that send-off we are launched into an appeal to the "Men of England" to save the girls condemned to consumption or husband-hunting by giving them, instead, "a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow." Again, the spirit that works through *Jane Eyre* claims above all things that it is Rochester's equal in intelligence, in will, in courage, and in power to face "the dark o' the world."

Since Sappho's time there has existed the tradition of a woman's secret. If indeed there be one, it was Emily Brontë who came nearer than anyone else towards the expression of it; it was Charlotte who watched her sister's close approach to that revelation.

This question of the woman's secret goes deep into the springs of life. For are there not kingdoms which we instinctively name "woman-countries," as there are periods when the male principle of being has impressed itself most deeply on the tide of life? We call Italy a "woman-country," just as we feel that the Victorian time was essentially virile. For the deepest faith of the Victorians regarded all life as a course of ever-widening conquest, as a great pilgrimage upwards from the depths to the heights. In this there can be but one ultimate duty; that is, not to hinder the pace. For



we march from darkness to light, from weakness to power. We march and our slogan must be "progress." But this reaction to life is the man's view : it is the slogan of a virile faith, and in this sense the morality of the iron law as seen by George Eliot is as masculine as the song of a Tennyson with his vision of the "sublime event" in the æons yet to come.

In essentials this is still the faith of our time, although the Victorians believed that the road for the race's advance was already laid, while we cannot even see ourselves as road-makers or path-finders. We conceive ourselves to be rather as men who drive through aerial regions where no roads can ever be. Laws, that is, are yielding to living impulses. Yet still the pulse of faith beats to the same measure : still we pass towards things unknown.

Compared with this view the instinct of the woman spirit is static ; possessing in some measure the vision of the inner causal regions, it perceives life as though held in suspension. The vision of a mystic travels nowhither : merely in a moment a window opens. This direct vision is no prophecy of what may be : it is the knowledge of what already is. And in whatever state of outward being humanity may find itself, the vision of the central heart is the same. This, I take it, is the woman's secret.

In Michael Angelo's Spanish Chapel we find expressed in stone the man's horror of the manifested world ; of life as humanity has made it. In one Medici figure on the wall is action as a brainless, inane youth ; opposite, a skull in a serpent-fold shows how sinister thought can be. The inner and the outer life are both evil, and below them the vast and beautiful figures of Man and Woman are unwilling to awake : the tremendous human forces are like men who lean on their elbows unwilling even to move. From this sight the child Christ turns in horror. It is only the woman holding the babe who looks out across this scene, herself unfretted by anger or disgust.

She has other visions : for at the heart of this storm of evolution there is eternal peace.

That is Emily Brontë's secret : in a measure it is the woman's secret. There is no notion in Emily's soul of the

onward march of humanity, of the slow stages in its conquest of darkness. To Emily Brontë the outer life of experience was like something shadowy in a mirror. She was not involved in it ; she saw instead the other side of being.

In small things as in great this was true. Charlotte's picture of Shirley Keeldar is the intimate, domestic picture of an essential woman. This is how Charlotte writes of her : " There were periods when she took delight in perfect vacancy of hand and eye—moments when her thoughts, her simple existence, the fact of the world being around—and heaven above her, seemed to yield her such fulness of happiness, that she did not need to lift a finger to increase the joy. . . . Her sole book in such hours was the dim chronicle of memory, or the sibyl page of anticipation ; from her young eyes fell on each volume a glorious light to read by. . . . "

That " glorious light " is the inner vision in which the works of time are all unknown ; in which effort is the spirit of another mode of being. This " light " belongs to that causal region where all is an eternal Now. Put humbly, intimately, this is how Charlotte read her sister's daily life. Emily's own word is : " Life—that in me has rest." She has, in fact, no need of that ideal of incessant travel by which her own age lived, as ours does. She even writes—a curious phrase indeed—" vain are the thousand creeds—to waken doubt in one holding so fast by thine infinity " : the function of a creed was surely never yet to waken doubt ? Creeds are commonly regarded as life-lines thrown across the void of darkness. But to Emily, since there is no darkness, there is therefore no need of life-lines. She has before her the vision of the woman in the Medici Chapel, and therefore the spectacle of humanity held under the spell of foolish action and evil thought has no terror at all for her. Nelly Dean says in *Wuthering Heights* : " I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break." To Nelly that repose came only under the shadow of death ; but Nelly Dean's creator lived always in the eternal rest. In this vision of eternal changelessness love needs must have a chief part, and therefore Catherine speaks of Heathcliff in terms that recall Emily Brontë's own description of the Eternal : " If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be."

It is not far from this to—

“ Though earth and man were gone,  
And suns and universes ceased to be,  
And Thou wert left alone,  
Every existence would exist in Thee.”

The life within knows nothing of that change which is the essential essence of the creed of the Life Force that, incessantly bringing forth and destroying, moves for ever onward. The heath and the harebells of *Wuthering Heights* have a past and a future, the very winds that blow across them will pass from the earth; but there are no “unquiet slumbers” for those whose life is within.

The religion of a scientific age is that of evolution, of change, and to that evolving the noblest spirits dedicate themselves. The thought that moves to the measure of incessant toil is simply the principle expressed by St. Paul: “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” It is a great creed, but one full of unrest, for its vital essence is that of struggle and effort. It sets itself to conquest, for it is a man’s creed. Its dread shadow is that realisation of the evils of life which fairly turns the brains of some; its hope is that the spirit of travel may grow ever stronger and stronger till there are none at all who fall out by the way, and no unworthy camp-followers.

But behind it, and beyond it, there is another vision, a vision that does not need to wait for the coming of that “Strange Power” whose advent Emily Brontë describes in *The Visionary*, because the peace of the eternal is not dependent on any coming or going. It has been written of her: “she faces every terror, and to her pained apprehension birth and death and life are alike terrible.” A sentence more exquisitely wrong than this it would be hard to find, for in the “glorious light” of Emily Brontë’s vision not even the ill-starred course of human history could be seen as terrible.

Emily Brontë’s escape from the time in which she was born is complete: the framework of Victorian thought has simply no existence for her.

Charlotte, however, although she saw her sister escape, yet hung between the two worlds. That is the tragedy of Charlotte Brontë. She realises at moments the free world in which her sister lived, but she cannot remain consistently within it. There is, therefore, an extraordinary contrast between the



painful puritanism of her letters and the fiery spirit she shows again and again in her creative work whenever she refuses illusion and turns her back on sophistry. Yet Charlotte's courage was greater, in one sense, than Emily's; Emily, indeed, had no need of courage, since she was always conscious of the world behind phenomena. Charlotte it was who saw that world in mere glimpses: what she faced was the sorrowful earth, and though her thoughts could, on occasions, wander through eternity, she refused to lose herself therein. Her pride was that of Lucifer, towards fate and men, towards things earthly and heavenly.

This temper of Charlotte's it was that kept her outside the marching faith of her contemporaries. In all the great typical Victorians we are aware of a vast background of belief, or of bias. They see the rolling ages pass as no other creators have seen them. Thackeray keeps his mayflies fluttering half whimsically, half mournfully, but they die and are re-born from generation to generation; Carlyle sees the fiery lava-flow, with Jehovah speaking in thunder above it; Dickens sees life's river growing deeper and kindlier; to George Eliot the law grows clearer as the ages pass, and Tennyson fixes his eyes on the forward march to the "divine event." These are of their age and time.

But Charlotte Brontë lives always on the personal plane; there is no dim background to her picture, not even when, in *Shirley*, she tries to paint a picture of the Industrial Age in the North. Charlotte is untouched by that great creed of evolving humanity which worked so powerfully on the imaginations of her fellow-writers.

Only one thing was hers by which she could stay herself. That was the incessant presence before her of her sisters' sure vision of the eternal, causal, static region. That, and her own honesty; her refusal to be deceived. Evidently to her the Evangelical creed of obedience and humility meant nothing; neither did that instinctive sense of the passing ages and their purpose which is the hall-mark of Victorian thought. Of this Charlotte had no conception. Emily had no need of it. The Brontës are completely outside the Time Spirit of their period. Emily escaped triumphantly. Charlotte escaped sadly, but bravely. She simply never breathed the mental air of her own



time ; she never broods over the passing centuries, being too poignantly conscious of the sting of her own existence. Emily's influence was too great to allow Charlotte to escape from that lamp-lit parlour of Haworth ; probably, too, Charlotte shared, not the power of Emily's temperament, but its natural bias.

Emily stands, then, triumphantly alone, but Charlotte presents the picture of a being held in mid-air. As a girl, she advises her friend to avoid the comedies of Shakespeare ; she writes letters full of pious advice on the conduct of life. So far she yields to the priggish puritanism of her day. Then, later on, she paints the portrait of Madame Rachel, as Vashti : " I thought it was only a woman . . . Behold. I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man ; in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her thro' the tragedy. . . . They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow."

Here is the thing that Charlotte really worshipped : it was power. Every now and again in the midst of her realism she is carried off into the power-house of human character, whence come those tremendous forces of will which prove that, whatever God may be, man at least is a spirit. " I am ; and what I am nothing, not all the hosts of earth or hell, can kill " : such was Charlotte's flickering, recurring, hesitating faith ; the thing she knew in her great moments. She felt, in her rare and vital outbursts of creation, what a martyr feels when he bathes in the flames of the faggots ; what a man feels when " he dies on the cross with all the pleasure in life." That buoyant, resilient, unquenchable spirit caught Charlotte Brontë now and then as though she had been swept away on a whirlwind. It is the same indomitable genius that lives in the type of woman she draws ; the small, plain, green-eyed being of her books, who is always with her back to the wall and fighting. It is this spirit which opens out joyfully towards Paul Emanuel, because he is built of it : spare, swarthy, fiery, spiritual, that little man is forged, not begotten.

There is nothing whatever in all this of the eternal calm that is timeless, and still less of the vast unfolding of human destiny. For the two Brontë sisters were alike in this ; the inspiration of their souls moved inwards to the creative depths, not outward to the vast flowing river of creation's effects. Charlotte knew some of the secrets of the divine fire, but Emily,

we feel, had solved the secret of the divine light. Charlotte resisted her own inspiration, often pinning herself down to the accomplished fact; Emily gave herself gladly to the great breath.

To Emily on the heights there came no frustration, while Charlotte in the arena knew nothing else. She loved—Paul Emanuel, but that Paul Emanuel was M. Héger is impossible. Men like the fiery little Professor of the Rue d'Isabelle, with the spiritual force of a genius and the humility of a divine child, are not found in earthly schools. Such men may exist in Plato's over-world, but here below we only catch their wavering shadows.

It is M. Héger's glory that he provided the wavering shadow.

But it is a mistake to suppose that Charlotte wanted a great lover merely; what she thirsted for was—a great world, a world with feelings and passions great enough to match her own. Instead, she got little men, little attentions, an obscure fate of bereavement and sorrow. Undoubtedly she was starved; so starved of brilliant life that she lost her head before the attraction of a handsome man. And this Byronism of hers, partly literary, but mainly temperamental, would have made monstrous creatures of most of Jane Austen's pompous, solemn heroes. She shows the same failure when she tries to paint the noonday world, the great scene of trade and homeliness. *Middlemarch* by the side of *Shirley* proves the difference at once. Just as Charlotte could not see a man plainly as a thing of moods moving on two homely legs, so she could not see the scheme of town and countryside, the scene of small victories and smaller defeats. Wherever depth of feeling was not required her intensity betrayed her. This is the hysteria of Charlotte Brontë. In this sense Mrs. Gaskell is greater than she, and *Ruth* a finer book than *Jane Eyre*.

Charlotte only speaks truly in those tense moments when another scale of values than those of the market-place are demanded. Hers is genius driven into dark places; genius divorced from the broad noon. Her writing comes out like a lightning flash in zigzag lines, as in the panic fear of the red room in *Jane Eyre*, in the web of subtle joy and fear that fills that house, that dream-house where all is real, in the Rue

d'Isabelle. For the genius of Charlotte Brontë frustration did what disease accomplished for Dostoevsky : it gave her visions of the great passion play which goes on incessantly behind the outward show of human actions. His vision was clear, spiritual, limpid ; hers spasmodic, fiery, passionate. In the Russian there is something serene and divine ; in the English-woman appears a spirit tortured and alien to the world in which it finds itself. For Charlotte Brontë—it is the final truth about her—had no world in which all of her, and all at once, was—at home. Yet what St. Augustine said of God might be said of the artistic creation of both Dostoevsky and Charlotte Brontë : “ rather would I, not finding, find Thee, than finding, not find Thee.”

There are two forms of art, that of the mirror and that of the forge. The mirror art is almost always the more perfect. Humour finds room to play in it, and delicate irony shines, glow-worm like, in its quiet picture. But into the forge, men and women fling their heart-strings and in that fiery welding strange shapes are flung forth.

The art of the forge is the art, too, of the egoist, for there is nothing about this form of creation which can produce the heart at leisure from itself. In the great resistance scene, for instance, where Jane repulses Rochester's passion, the motive is not morality at all ; it is simply the pride of personality, the superb egoism that, even in the poor and lowly, will—bow to nothing, either from within or without. Even to save Rochester himself, Jane would not sacrifice her pride of self. “ I am of value to myself,” she cries ; that is the inner law.

To George Eliot how different would have been that dilemma, for to her virile mind the last act of baseness is not the betrayal of self, but the betrayal of the race in its upward struggle. When Stephen Guest and Maggie Tulliver part, they argue like moralists ; Stephen talks of natural law, and Maggie counters him with talk of “ longings after perfect goodness,” and then goes for advice to Dr. Kean who babbles of the relaxed discipline of the Church. In all Charlotte Brontë's work there is no glimpse whatever of the world of thought that is signified by the phrase “ a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human.” For Charlotte Brontë had no natural vision of the vast issues that



can only be decided by the minute victories or defeats of myriads of tiny creatures whose work we cannot even see individually. Charlotte lives instead for "the harps in the air" of personal passion and personal pain. She knows the present greatness of the self. And that is enough for her.

Charlotte's world, the world of personal pain and joy, was an infinitely narrower one than that of her sister. Emily, as "Shirley Keeldar," shows a keen desire to cope with the miseries of a suffering world, while Charlotte, when she writes of the children flocking into the mill at six o'clock of a February morning, merely hopes that they were not much nipped by cold. The Brontë vision of industrialism was that of their time; it was one of the streams of Pactolus that shall bless the poor. "The homeless, the starving, the unemployed, shall come to Hollow's Mill from far and near; and Joe Scott shall give them work, and Louis Moore, Esq., shall let them a tenement." Yet they knew, these two sisters, that the fairies of Fieldhead Hollow must needs be banished by the hum of the machines.

We can count the worlds of which Emily's soul was free if we work upwards from the earth itself, that tragic earth which she adored, the earth of a myriad graves, of a myriad memories, half defaced, yet readable by a heart like hers.

" I see around me piteous tombstones grey  
Stretching their shadows far away.  
Beneath the turf my footsteps tread  
Lie low and lone the silent dead;  
Beneath the turf, beneath the mould,  
For ever dark, for ever cold.  
And my eyes cannot hold the tears  
That memory hoards from vanished years.  
For Time and Death and mortal pain  
Give wounds that will not heal again."

From that world it is a short step to the earth-memories over which she brooded for years in the epic cycle of the Gondal Poems. If, as modern science seems to suggest, there is bound up in submerged memory the story of the past, is not Emily in these poems brooding over a cycle of events that took place in some forgotten age of heroic history? In the Gondal legend there is the doomed child, the frustrated passion of an ill-



starred pair. And this is, apparently, as May Sinclair has shown, the very story taken from the plane of the heroic Age and planted down on a rough Yorkshire Moor.

But the Moor is not the place of the story; the air that blows in *Wuthering Heights* is not the heath wind you may breathe to-day. And although its story may be even read from those Akasha records of which occultism speaks, the murky air of passionate desires and hates is another world again than that of the old tragic earth. The love of earth, the more than pagan love of earth in Emily Brontë, is her basic world, but she uses it as the leaping-off place from which to reach zone beyond zone of experience. First, she attains from this intense consciousness of the Earth as an entity, to the gathering place of human storms, the region of passion, of lust, desire, hate, of those extraordinary winds that sweep for ever across the world of manifested things; that live in sex, in war, in strife, and even in the passionate longing to give, to save, to heal. Here, above *Wuthering Heights*, is then the gathering place of all the storms that beat through human nature.

But this is not the only world which Emily Brontë reached. She passed upwards again into yet another region, that known to St. John of the Cross, that of the supreme union of the spirit. We are accustomed to see in the Christian mystics, as in the Pagan, a direct leaping of the chasm from the flesh to the mystery of divine reunion. But in Emily Brontë there exists a lower world of mystery where the spirit seeks, and finds, not union with the source of all, but union with the lover, with the soul predestined for it from the beginning. She knows that world, too, knows it, Maeterlinck says, as though she had lived through years of burning kisses.

She is at home, standing with her feet on the earth and its graves, with the chronicle of earth's past, with the passion of lovers, with the passion of man for God. And on Stilbro' Moor she sees Creative Nature working on the loom as a Woman. Finally, from all these she sees at last the fading of the created universe and its resurrection in the life of the Eternal. She knew more, indeed, than they know who have burnt beneath thirty years of kisses. For she passed from world to world.

"Do not condemn yourself to live by halves," writes Charlotte to Ellen Nussey. Charlotte's great word is "relish"; her mind "relishes" freedom of thought; her palate "relishes" coffee. In Emily's case relish becomes thirst, a thirst divine for ever more and more experience of that which is within.

She escaped her century and its creeds because she had no need of their consolations. And, living in the shadow of her sister's genius, Charlotte also spurned this consolation. She did not even see it.

## CHAPTER II

### BROWNING

THE Frenchman who remarked that genius loses twenty-five per cent. of its effect through being born in England might have been thinking of Browning. For here is a man, one of the most living and vivid that ever breathed, who has been buried under the heavy tombstone of his adorers' piety. Dreadful societies used to be formed in order to dissect his philosophy ; even more dreadful books have been written on his metaphysics. We have almost forgotten that the man was a poet, for his name has been written, not in water, but in lead.

It would seem, in fact, that the spectacle of a happy man is so rare among us that we must needs do with him what sportsmen do with a rare bird ; that is, go and shoot him down for our show-case. It is true enough that the fact of Browning's happy temperament strikes one as a strange and questionable thing. For, if one looks down the long gallery of creative artists one finds scarcely one of these, among the moderns, at any rate, who does not put first and foremost among his impressions the sense of the weight and misery of this unintelligible world. That being so, one must needs ask oneself two questions : Is it true that life actually weighs sadly on the millions who have no means of self-expression ? And again, Why is it that this joyous and beautiful life of Robert Browning's is not more usual among the artists ?

It is not easy to exaggerate the happy fitness of Browning's life and spirit. From the splendid vigour of his youth, that could find romance in Camberwell, and felt no need of Italian skies, to the confident acceptance of the world of new horizons that was rising over Europe in those years which followed the French Revolution, the same note is struck throughout his days, both in public things and private. That note is one of

confident assurance in the absolute solidity of the universe. Browning can stamp as violently as he pleases in the house of life because he knows it to be no mere structure of lath and plaster. He can jest with the most solemn thought and make pals of all the knaves in history or out of it ; and the more knavish they are, the more they please him. He is afraid of nothing ; neither of the coming age, like Carlyle ; nor of the rabble and its free speech, like Matthew Arnold ; neither of life nor of death. In fact, he is particularly in love with death. Scientists sometimes hint that the true origin of man's timidity, of his almost universal fear, is mere birth, and that if we all came into the world by the Cæsarian method of entry, we should come without fear. Yet no such legend is told of the arrival of the infant Browning, who seems to have made his bow to the world in the ordinary way.

He never had to earn his living, however ; he was born of a scholarly father with a conscience, and of a mother who was a Scottish gentlewoman, with all that the fact means of aristocratic manners and refined prejudice. In his youth he was gallant and handsome, a lad with lemon-coloured kid gloves, who wrote splendid love-songs. His love-story is, of course, one of the very few actual experiences which one can call idyllic. It has no least touch of regret about it and therefore it is unique in the annals of English poets. When he wrote *Any Wife to Any Husband* he put into words the very heart of what women feel about the easy way in which men forget. This story of our race, so wearisomely full of failures in noble fulfilment of ideals, is lit up with the purest white light by the love-story of the two poet souls, Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. And that last savage outburst against Fitzgerald, who had spoken disparagingly of Mrs. Browning, that cry, " I felt as if she had only died yesterday," after she had been in her grave for years, is a sort of promise of tremendous possibilities for human faithfulness. A man there was once who loved like this ; surely Nature did not break the mould into which he was run ?

Yet Browning was a typical man of the middle-class, a descendant of two generations of men who had been clerks in the Bank of England, and a man who himself never lost the middle-class preference for precise order, its hatred for any-



thing socially doubtful, slipshod or Bohemian. This prejudice is the sole link, indeed, between the actual Browning and his pious worshippers. For Browning was a model husband, and as amusingly protective of his wife as any Nonconformist parson could be. He would not have his wife thrown into trances, or brought into contact by Home, the medium, with doubtful characters either in this world or the next, but he made ample amends to Spiritualism by writing that extraordinary piece of analysis, *Sludge the Medium*.

This work gives the clue to Browning's position as a creator, a supremely great, creator in personality. More, it explains his superb confidence in existence. All his life, Browning was facing the plain fact of "the evil that men do." He was, in temperament, and apart from his powerful intellect, a simple man; in plain terms, a good man. Yet he found all around him that strange and ever-baffling problem of bad men and, even worse, of good men who are so often bad. With that "badness" Browning is intensely preoccupied. Strictly speaking, as a creator of character he makes it his chief subject. Wickedness, evil-doing, is the centre of most of his most characteristic work, of the great series of Dramatic Monologues, as well as of *The Ring and the Book*. And from the blasphemy of *Caliban* up to the cruelty of Guido, from the mean cheating of Sludge up to the noble cheating of Djabal in *The Return of the Druses*, he is at work on one idea—the secrets of bad men's hearts. He is, in fact, expressing for them, as they cannot do for themselves, what good it is they were seeking when they went out to do evil. He is putting their case for them as omniscience would do at the last great Assize. In the superb phrase of G. K. Chesterton, Browning goes into "the foulest of thieves' kitchens and accuses men of virtue." This middle-class man of dandified dress and refined manners is preoccupied with the meanest of the vices, with those offences and characters that are utterly outside the pale of most men's tolerance.

Other artists might, of course, have chosen such themes, for they would yield much entertainment to the genius of irony or satire. But Browning is the last man in the world to look at another man ironically. He lays bare the thoughts of such a man as Bishop Blougram simply because, such is his own

confidence in the divine quality of the stuff of life, he finds in Blougram's heart a thread that connects even a time-serving Churchman, a colossal hypocrite, with the heart of God. You may put the matter cynically, and say, "No man is ever wrong in his own eyes." That is probably true, and it may actually be that the foulest murder, the biggest lie, has a secret root that is neither cruel nor mean. The offence is due to a power thwarted, to a desire that can find but a crooked vent. There is, no doubt, more strangeness hidden in the phrase "the secrets of all hearts" than simple people imagine.

Take, for instance, an example that would have appealed to Browning himself. It is the case of an old burglar, an incorrigible ruffian, who had "done time" for fourteen years of his life and had been convicted again and again for house-breaking. His face matched his story; it was rough, coarse, animal. Then suddenly, in the midst of talk, his eyes brightened and he slipped out a passionate, excited phrase. "Ah," cried he, "but it's a wonderful thing to get into a sleeping house. It's all so quiet, they knowing naught, and you there. Quiet, still; you listen, up goes the window, and you're in." All the romance of a lifetime was in the low, quivering phrase, "Ah, but it's a queer thing, a wonderful . . ." He will live and die, this old man, with a secret in his heart that a boy might cherish; a joy that probably the judge once knew, but has now forgotten.

In this subject "made for his hand," of bad men's hearts, Browning follows two lines of thought: first, how easily a truth slides into a lie; second, how no man sins in a void. We have, in fact, a trick, when we think of the evil-doer, of seeing him working his evil will in a world of kindness and help, not of temptation and hindrance. But it is not so; the evil that men do is provoked in them by the evil done to them. Years of bitter humiliation and poverty, of scorn and contempt, have gone, for instance, to the making of Guido in *The Ring and the Book*. He was not alone in the killing of Pompilia, but those who mocked his poverty and made him the embittered hater of his kind must share the responsibility for what he did. So far most observers of the world will go with Browning. And certainly no one who reads *Sludge the Medium* and follows the shifting changes of those invitations to inven-

tion which turned him into a cheat will deny that Sludge was made by the inquisitive fools who wanted a catspaw in their game with fire. Sludge is Everyman, when put in Sludge's place. Or almost Everyman. And as for Bishop Blougram, ninety-nine out of a hundred of us carry him somewhere about us, while Djabal, the great leader who played a part to save his race, and Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, the small man who murdered that the mass might live in peace, tax our casuistry to decide whether, villains or no, they did right or wrong. Action is seldom or ever a clear-cut issue ; and no man is alone responsible for his acts, because the crime of murder must be borne by me, who never heard of the murderer or of the murdered man, but who have incessantly acquiesced in the existence of the spirit of hate through which men come to kill. Each man is therefore responsible for all. And further, each man, though he may be mistaken, seeks in his heart what seems to him a good, even when he goes out to do evil.

So far the position of the wrong-doer can be argued. But here Browning does the strange and inexplicable thing. For suddenly through the lips of the most abandoned rascal he expresses his vision of the eternal rightness ; he makes God speak ; not from Sinai, but from a rogue. Sludge has pursued little things all through his life, things unnoticed by others. It is through this faculty, indeed, that he has got his living. This power is his solitary gift, but he has not let it rust. He has played his game and it is to this revelation he attains :—

“ We find great things are made of little things,  
And little things go lessening till at last  
Comes God behind them . . . ”

. . . . .

“ The Name comes close behind a stomach-cyst,  
The simplest of creations, just a sac  
That's mouth, heart, legs, and belly all at once, yet lives  
And feels . . . ”

Sludge finds, through his one talent, that every lie is “ quick with a germ of truth,” and that “ there's a strange secret sweet self-sacrifice in any desecration of one's soul to a worthy end. . . . ”

Here indeed is a strange soul of goodness in things evil,



and with the discovery of it we touch the inner heart of Browning's own nature, the secret obsession that makes him the happiest man that ever lived. He believed that men do evil, and in doing it, find God, for they find in it the root-instinct of man, and of God—the impulse to self-sacrifice.

When some great music pours forth a divine strain it is easy to believe that we have caught a momentary glimpse of a region of consciousness where pain shall be lost in ecstasy. Perhaps there is such an immortal region; in fact, for a moment we cannot doubt that there is. We feel as Abt Vogler felt, as Caponsacchi felt when he thought of the glory of Pompilia's soul and body. We know for a second that

“ There shall never be one lost good ! What was shall live as before ;  
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;  
What was good shall be good, with for evil,  
So much good more.”

Then the strains fail and earth comes back, with its struggle and inevitable air of fourth-rateness in the scale of imaginable worlds. The poor student gathers his ragged robe round him and tries to forget the coldness of his garret—and his fate—in some dream. But he knows it to be a dream.

Sludge is another matter; there is no glory about him; he has lied about the spirit, but, because he did pursue something, practise some gift, he has had his reward.

“ I've told my lie,” he says,

“ And seen truth follow, marvels none of mine.  
All was not cheating, sir, I'm positive.”

He has merely travestied the mystery of the Unseen and, with amazing complacency, the Unseen has answered him and his diligence, his one virtue. He has found God behind the trifle; and the “ Name ” behind the stomach-sac. Greatest discovery of all, he has found the secret spring of all men's lives—that they must go the way of sacrifice. One must, he sees, either move by honest self-sacrifice to bring good, moving along the way of the sun; or—it is a strange dark secret—move widdershins, against the sun, the evil way, which is to sacrifice one's soul. To do so is “ strange, secret, sweet.” But it is sacrifice, anyway; it is worship; it is, it may be, the



Black Mass, but, none the less, a Mass. A cheat says this ; a harlot may say the same. There is, even for cheats and harlots, a sweetness in sacrifice.

These are deep waters indeed. But deeper still do they appear when one realises that Browning saw the same nature in God that he saw in man ; that he saw in Christ the same motive that he saw in Sludge.

For these rogues, these evil men, still serve, because they still sacrifice, even if it be only the good in their natures ; they have a purpose that seems to them good. Blougram wants power over men ; Sludge, power over trifles ; Djabal, to carry his race to their home ; the Prince, tranquillity. They pay the price for these things. In Browning's eyes the only man who is damned is the man who won't pay. He knows full well that the world is held in bonds by the mass of men who are too timid to risk any shaking of the delicate balance they call civilisation, who fear the devil they know, however devilish he may be, far less than they fear the devil they don't know ; who are too perfect to risk the mud of the gutter in order to clean it. Young men are still ordained to the service of good, but are they asked this question before they are accepted as candidates to the service of professional goodness : " Under what circumstances, if any, would you be ready to raise hell in order to make something better ? Give concrete examples."

No one knew better than this man, Browning, that the world moves upwards, if it moves at all, by the work of those who do not stand on too much ceremony with their own goodness, their own piety and perfection. It was a queer fish that the conventional moralists caught in their net when they tackled Browning. But then, like wise men, they cut him up quickly in order that they might not be terrified by a realisation of his queerness. They lie very low indeed about that *Statue and the Bust*, where the end was a crime, but where Browning blames the two who did not commit it, who were unwilling to pay the price of their holiness for the thing they wanted, namely, happiness.

Browning knew that things get done by sacrifice, even of good ; and only so. Is it not the bitter kernel of statesmanship that it has always to let the full good go, in order to get

the half-good? And has not the statesman had to sacrifice a thousand times in history his own perfect probity in order to get, not the half-good, nor even the quarter? Browning in his own "great hour," when he saved the woman he loved from a slow decline to a miserable death, had to cheat her father; he did it, but he could not bring himself to lie to the maidservant by asking for "Miss Barrett" when she was actually "Mrs. Browning." What had to be paid down in sacrifice, he paid; but not a tittle over. Presumably the smooth men, those timid, conventional Churchmen who left Pompilia helpless in the hands of her brutal husband, sacrificed their manliness for a purpose, too; for nine-tenths of the cowardice which smooth men, and particularly pious men, show in face of evil is due to the last great fear of civilisation, the fear of making things worse.

The good have grown mean in service of the truth; that is their hell.

To Browning, sacrifice is at the bottom of all that man does; this sacrifice may be worship, and go the way of the sun, for it may be the laying down of all that a man loves in order that he may get some higher good than he has actually touched before; or it may be the worship of the Dark Power, the sacrifice of what is noble to what is ignoble. In that case, it is a bad bargain. But, since it is the living-out of the creative man, it does not go without its reward. The old burglar earned his thrilling moments by the years of dreary sameness in prison; the judge who sentenced him must also have laid down a thousand times, in the supposed service of the social order, his sense of ideal justice. The Pope in *The Ring and the Book*, himself on the verge of eternity, in that long argument through which he brings himself to the point of sentencing Guido, sacrifices the man in himself to the dread office of pronouncing judgment. He has to lay aside "the old clean linen garb" of simple manhood before he can send Guido to his doom. Anatole France is at one with Browning on this point, when he says, putting the words into the mouth of his "First Judge": "A judge, when he goes to the seat of justice, puts off his humanity. He assumes divinity and no longer tastes either joy or sorrow." And that is, in truth, a heavy sacrifice; perhaps there is no heavier in all the long

list of earthly payments. To play the Omniscient, as though he were truly God, is a heavy burden for a man.

Sacrifice, then, being the heart of Browning's faith, what principle does he put as the supreme element of all sacrifice? What is the one great Commandment in his Decalogue?

He expresses it in his version of Pompilia, who is the very corner-stone of all his creative work. She only rebels; only lays down, not her life, but the principle of goodness which she has served all her life, namely, obedience, acquiescence in the will of fate, for one supreme purpose, that of saving her child. She serves Life, in fact, and this, according to Browning, is the one perfect sacrifice, the aim and goal of all effort, all giving and renouncing. It is, too, a service that runs through all Nature. The Pope puts it:—

“ Mother elect, to save the unborn child,  
As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly,  
Ay, and I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant  
And flower o' the field, all in a common pact  
To worthily defend the trust of trusts,  
Life from the Ever Living.”

No man has ever loved life more truly than Browning did; nor is his zest confined to mere colour and beauty; drab and common things are not to him simply dramatic properties used to give an air of vraisemblance to his picture, they are the very stuff of life itself. *Childe Harold to the Dark Tower Came* is, perhaps, the strangest poem in the English language, for in all the mean, bleak, ugly landscape where “the very grass grew as scant as hair in leprosy,” there broods the sinister light of such fear as one knows only in dreams; in dreams, indeed, that seem to be a hideous presage of a world of consciousness more frightful than the hell of fire. Yet Browning's pictures are of the mean corners outside a modern industrial town, places where old horses graze before they visit the knacker. And if Fear has such backgrounds as these, Love is in Browning just as homely in its circumstances, nor would he ever apologise, as Hardy almost does, for introducing a carving-knife or a “shame-bought parasol” into a tale of love and sorrow. Indeed, both carving-knives and parasols, or jackdaws and parrots, are in themselves fascinating to a man who, like Browning, sees the mysterious working of Life in



all the forms taken by matter, especially when the human will has helped to carve these forms. Browning is, therefore, by no means afraid of the grotesque, and plays with it as joyfully as a child, or as did the mediæval craftsmen who put images of men with toothache, or headache, to glorify God in the solemn aisle of a cathedral. And why not? For God, or the devil, made the toothache; and Browning always found it impossible to distinguish between God and devil, since he was more than half convinced that the devil is—just God turned inside out, or upside down, for purposes that would commend themselves to our mind if only we understood more clearly the working of the divine intelligence.

Browning's eyesight was very extraordinary, for the eyes were differently focused, one being excessively short-sighted and the other extremely long-sighted. He was, we are told, in the habit of shutting the former when he looked at landscape, and the latter when he read or wrote. This fact, this physical fact, is extremely significant, for where Carlyle's great sense was that of hearing, so that he heard not merely macaws and parrots and neighbours' pianos, but the march of coming events, Browning saw everything, both that which is so far distant that even he could catch but its shadow, and that which is so tiny that it is only visible to most men with a microscope.

He saw, too, in common shapes the patterns that they make and the suggestions they convey to the imaginative mind. There is, in fact, no bigger testimony to his sanity of mind than that he could use, and even play with, an obsession that leads many to madness. For the sinister, grotesque, or dreadful forms taken by casual objects, by the flight of birds, by the grouping of house-roofs, even by patterns on a wall, or the blots and scrawls on a piece of blotting-paper have driven men mad before now. But these things, queer twisty shapes that to most men mean nothing, were actually to Browning a source of pleasure. He makes his Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, otherwise Napoleon the Third, conceive his plan for political action by joining two blots on a paper.

To most men such a fact—if fact it be—would be enough to damn the plan of the universe; for what can be more dreadful than a Fate which decides death and life for sentient beings by



scrawls at haphazard on a piece of paper? Yet Browning goes much farther than Paul in his confidence, for where the Apostle was convinced that neither height nor depth could separate him from the love of God, Browning could actually find the God of living, of the zest and laughter of it, in a mere catalogue of the objects made by God; thrown off, as it were, in the exuberant play of a great and joyous artist.

Much of the queer effect of Browning's verse is produced in this way; he liked puzzles, puns, technicalities of trade and craft. But if he himself liked these things, why, then, so must the Undying Life who pours out such an extraordinary medley of lights, shapes, colours, sounds, scents, thoughts, fancies, virtues—and sins. Browning did not at all shrink from this last item. Sins, like the devil, are somehow good; good turned upside down in order to attract our notice to the good which otherwise we should have missed. This being his very serious and certain creed, Browning naturally laid tremendous stress on form and pattern, from the zigzag of the lightning-flash to the scrawls on a paper made by an idle hand. To him nothing is idle.

It is impossible to exaggerate this side of Browning's character, since it is, in fact, the clue to any comprehension of him. Essentially he is just primitive man; his zest is a simple joy in all that primitive man delighted in, but with this tremendous difference between Browning and the Cave man, that the poet has somehow sloughed all the fear which made life so dreadful to our progenitors. Browning feels that "all's love," and, that being so, there is absolutely nothing to fear. Therefore one can play with everything, big and little, from leviathan down to a fly; from the rock summits of an Alpine range to the shapes made by the dregs in the bottom of a cup. And these last were as significant, and as pleasing, to Browning as ever they were to students of witchcraft. But modern men and women go about the universe picking and choosing all their days; this creature is ugly; that creature even horrible; the fecundity of Nature herself is a hateful fact to most of us. It is difficult, indeed, for many of us to repress a shiver of disgust at the sight of those creatures of the sea-depths which the dredge brings up; and a mass of toads in a hole is a sickening spectacle. But Browning delights in his catalogue of the

"pink and grey" jellies from the sea of which he writes in *The Englishman in Italy* :—

" You touch the strange lumps there, eyes open, all manner  
Of horns and of humps,  
Which only the fisher looks grave at . . . "

To anyone who has ever actually seen these horns and humps, these vast mouths and dreadful eyes, this passage tells more about Browning than many a volume of learned commentary on him. For this love of strangeness is not, in him, like a similar love in Leonardo da Vinci, since the Italian undoubtedly felt the sinister quality in strange shapes, in spiders and toads. But Browning is like a child with a jabberwock. All things to the child, Browning, are part of the show and all delightful—the parasol, the corset, or the mouse-trap; the knobby hippopotamus and the twisting serpent; Sludge, Blougram and Pompilia; even Guido, for does he not acknowledge at the last that even he has known the light when he sees it? And that last cry of his, "Pompilia, will you let them murder me!" is Browning's supreme expression of faith. He believes—nay, is sure—that the mean man and the villain, as well as the saint and sage, touch God, the Absolute, in the depths of their being.

Dostoevsky and Browning move in this matter of finding the Absolute in two opposite directions. To both the Russian and the Englishman this quest is the one real occupation of all things living, but Dostoevsky sends his protagonists of the Will out into the wilderness to find the Absolute which they cannot find within them; Browning moves inward and there discovers the Absolute sitting at home in the apparently arid waste of bad men's hearts.

Yet there is a curious agreement between the revolutionary Russian and the optimistic Englishman, for both men realise that there are but two methods by which one can deal with reality, with the Absolute, and that is either by supreme self-assertion or by utter self-sacrifice. To do all things, or to suffer all things, either will bring reality. You may be, in fact, a saint or a devil; but if you wish to be one with the underlying verity, you must not be a denier when your "great hour" comes, that hour when, for once in your lifetime, you

have the chance to put all things under your feet ; to wring the neck of every fear.

Guido met his great hour as they dragged him to the scaffold, Pompilia when she fled from Guido, Sludge when he faced the mystery behind the lies, Browning himself when he took Elizabeth Barrett out of her father's house. Life's business is, to Browning, just the making of a terrible choice.

For those who cannot take the leap, there remains the remaking, Ibsen's button-moulder, in fact.

Browning is repellent to the minds of many, for modern consciousness is shot through with the sense of pain. To such thinking, it is hard to see any reason or justice unless there be another world, for beasts as well as for men, and particularly for beasts, since they pay all here and get nothing in the deal. Browning had, apparently, as little of this sense of pain, this haunting undertone of every happy hour to men of to-day, as any Cave man. And, in fact, this sense of universal pain is in itself a sign of under-vitalised nerves, of hypersensitiveness. To feel it would have been impossible to so primitive a man as Browning. And when Tennyson said that Browning would die in a dress-suit, he was merely pointing out that Browning could be happy in the most unlikely circumstances, and could find beauty in a devil-fish or Nature in a drawing-room. This temperamental delight is more important than reason to a man's character, but, of course, speaking rationally, Browning found, like all Christians, a purpose in pain. It was to him the blow of the sculptor that releases the shape from the marble. This "shape" is, of course, the soul, the great object with which Browning was especially preoccupied as an artist, just as God Himself is preoccupied with it as the Master Artist. *Fra Lippo Lippi* is throughout a defence of the position that the work of the artist is just to paint soul by painting the myriad forms of flesh in which it clothes itself. At the very opening of his career as a poet he puts it in *Paracelsus* :—

" Hence, may not truth be lodged in all,  
The lowest as the highest ? Some slight film  
The interposing bar which binds a soul  
And makes the idiot just as makes the sage  
Some film removed, the happy outlet whence  
Truth issues proudly ? "



The artist's work, then, is just to clear the film, but, after all, to a Browning, the one process which really removes the film and shows the spirit clear is—Death. In *Paracelsus*, the great alchemist says: "I think the soul can never taste death." This question of personal immortality is the foundation-stone of Browning's conception of both art and life. He can argue it metaphysically, and *La Saisiaz* is, of course, one long philosophical argument; not perhaps a very successful one, certainly not a lucid one.

We find between the covers of his books no less than three Brownings; first, there is the Christian philosopher, whom the Browningites acclaim as the greatest of the three and who, in their eyes at least, is a fat cow that has swallowed the lean one, the poet Browning.

Second, there is the Browning whom G. K. Chesterton discovered, the man of such tremendous vitality that he could conceive of nothing which is actually dead. This man is the poet; he is God-intoxicated, because he is drunken with life. This man can embrace in one sweep of his arms the rogue, the saint, the murderer, the polyp, the spirit and the flesh, as well as the shapes made by natural movement. No man has ever been so drunk as he was with the wine of life.

Yet there is perhaps a third Browning to be caught; that is the Browning who can go to the edge of paradox and yet keep sane. This man is the zealot, almost the fanatic, for he finds Life proceeding to realise itself everywhere by sacrifice. This man sees sacrifice in lies, in truth; he sees it being offered on the scaffold or over the wine. Sacrifice is to him the one spiritual reality; perhaps the one thing that will be left when all the stars have gone out. It is perhaps the one Immortal. And as he puts his hand on it, he puts his hand on God. Browning's explanation of the great puzzle of the Atonement, of how God came to sacrifice the one perfect Being He had begotten, is that, as G. K. Chesterton says, God Himself was jealous of this gift of sacrifice as shown in His children, His creatures. He, until He had suffered, felt Himself meaner than the meanest man on earth who had ever suffered Earth's rough testing.

Browning accepts the full result of this apotheosis of sacrifice. He makes the Pope say:—



" I can believe the dread machinery  
Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else,  
Devised,—all pain, at most expenditure  
Of pain by who devised pain,—to evolve,  
By new machinery in counterpart,  
The moral qualities of man—how else ?  
To make him love in turn and be beloved,  
Creative and self-sacrificing, too,  
And thus eventually God-like."

Thus it was Pompilia's death and agony that brought to those around her their chance of proving themselves "God-like." It was a chance taken only by Caponsacchi. Yet, after all, the ultimate cause of these chances was—Guido, and Guido's crime. Therefore it is Guido, and none other, who is the means by which at least one man could raise himself to his full godlike stature.

The utmost that most of us can do for the devil is to make excuses for him ; it is Browning alone who makes the devil's occupation the pivotal trade of all existence.

But his age existed in order that the unrolling of the centuries might gradually eliminate the devil : his age had fixed its gaze on an infinitely distant goal. To Browning, the Christian, as to Emily Brontë, the Pagan, life was felt as an eternal Now. The phrase "evolving life" had no significance for either.

## CHAPTER III

### MEREDITH

MEREDITH is not for every man's money, even taking "man" to mean critic. He is the Sleeping Beauty of literature, being hedged about with a thicket of metaphor, besides other growth of cultivation. And even when you get to the Beauty through these obstacles, it has not quite the features you expected. All this is true, after years of critical writing about him, but the critics of his own time were, in regard to Meredith, in even worse case than ourselves, since an aristocrat, true-born by nature though not by class, was too big a fish for their nets, and the landing of it a horrible business. For of all the ages none is so truly middle-class as the Victorian.

Like all words with a vital meaning, "aristocrat" eludes definition. For if one takes it to mean "born for the top drawer," the phrase is likely to refer simply to the uglier contents of that place, namely, money. And, although Meredith liked a man, such as his Redworth, who could tell where the cat of money was jumping, this wealth-making is only a small part of that natural affinity for the great world that is Meredith's peculiar atmosphere.

He had a beautiful face, which some would call Greek, and the distinction that includes roughness as well as refinement was his. He is at home in the drawing-room, in the hunting-field, and even at a fight or on the common with the gipsies; everywhere, in fact, except in the shop, or the laboratory, and the chapel. A gentleman's seat is to him as delightful as it was to an eighteenth-century writer of Guide Books. His sympathies are with the squire and the labourer, not with the earnest, but heavy-handed member of the third estate. If he is a reincarnation, one would swear to his having known the quick wit of Athens and, more recently, the great age of English

squiredom. But there is a twist in the man, too. It is easy to make too much of No. 73, High Street, Portsmouth, where his father and grandfather, the great Melchisedek Meredith, in the words of the obituary notice, "for many years carried on a respectable trade in the Men's Mercery line," but the "Gentleman Georgy" of Meredith's schoolmates is, after all, the true father of the man. The family strain persists in him. Old Mel, the outfitter, was proud of dining as a gentleman at the tables of the county gentry; there was a legend, too, in the Meredith household of the blood of Welsh chieftains. This "top drawer" flavour comes out nowhere more subtly than in the type of woman whom Meredith admires, the dainty, fine-handed sort, with a "bosom" and a train of attendant loves and graces: women only one remove from the lady with the fan. The other women he liked were the frank-spoken, Rabelaisian old cynics of the great world, of whom he has painted so many speaking likenesses. The grand style is Meredith's, and would have been so, shop or no shop. But the shop drove it in, made it an obsession.

He touched, too, the other side of the same spirit in the pagan flavour of his philosophy; rough earth is the inspiration there and in that *Juggling Jerry* and *The Day of the Daughter of Hades* are alike; the moral is Gather ye Roses, and then say a grace for the good time you have had, not complaining of the shortness thereof. Such is the Cavalier spirit at a banquet. Mr. Galsworthy's Forsytes smell of the Stock Exchange, not of the soil, but they are of the same breed, allowing for the fact that the heroic age has yielded to the commercial. Both classes consider they have a right to the best of things, to the ripest fruits in the hothouse, to the best calf-binding on their library shelves, and in both worlds, that of Meredith and of Galsworthy, the finest bit of real property is a woman. Soames Forsyte is a heavier, coarser variety of Sir Willoughby Patterne; he claims his "rights," bodily ones mainly, where the great egoist merely snuffs up the feminine incense, but the principle is the same.

This aristocrat in taste looks at everything from the standpoint of an extremely quick, versatile and changeful intellect. And Meredith does not nap, mentally speaking, whatever Homer may do. His readers must always keep themselves

alert and braced for a series of shocks ; they sit under a never-ceasing shower-bath of metaphors and epigrams. But a shower-bath on the pate is not really conducive to clear-thinking, and the stupefying result of Meredith's style is seen in the lofty mountains of eulogy that are scaled by Meredith's admirers and the doleful plunges into the depths of depreciation that are made by others who do not admire him.

It is, in fact, difficult to appreciate Meredith's true position as a creator of personality, for to approach life creatively from the standpoint of the dry intellectual light does actually make men appear strange and unnatural. We are accustomed to see people bathed in the air, more or less aqueous, of the earth ; they are at first as bewildering as men without shadows when we see them clothed only in ether. Not that Meredith's people, outside his grotesques, are unusual ; they are merely presented in an unusual light. Clara Middleton is a nice girl ; Richard Feverel is a spirited young man ; Beauchamp is a logical enthusiast ; even Diana is a witty woman with a heart, and not so very uncommon, after all. As for the Egoist, he is " all of us," as Meredith himself said ; only the light that is turned on him is a vision which pierces deeper and deeper till it reaches nothingness. His young men are ordinary fellows submitted to the ordeal of experience ; his striving women are busy, like most women, with getting upsides with a society that has clogged the dice heavily against them. And Meredith clothes them in charm because he hates that dice-trickery. All this is our world, though it hardly looks like it.

For Meredith is not a comfortable novelist ; he never gives us the local atmosphere as of a place we could find and live in. All other English writers of his time excelled in the power to breathe the real air that human beings require for their lungs. Time and place are everything with them. Consider the elfin twilight, in this respect, of *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre* ; the comfortable homesteads and turnipy fields of George Eliot ; the ancestral town-houses, with funeral hatchments, of Thackeray ; or the pea-soup fog, with muffins, of Dickens. We can tell kitchen from parlour in these, or city smoke from the wind over hayfields. In Meredith, all this is not ; with him you cannot sit down in your corner and be cosy there. Raynham Abbey, Queen Anne Farm and Patterne Hall are but



places where one strikes the roots "which meet the fires beneath"; they are not built on soil, loam or otherwise, which could be ploughed. The only occasion when Meredith is really on the earth and in its air is when he is dealing with wild Nature, with storm or drought, with mountain, sea or wood. He is a countryman of England then; he who, whenever human beings appear on the scene, is turned into a pure intelligence.

But if Meredith, being no natural inhabitant of that "over the shop," was born in the wrong place, he was still worse served when it came to time. By social temperament he belonged, on one side, to the ages of leisure, when gentlefolks were naturally supplied with refined seclusion; his natural place of residence is the walled garden of the Decamerone, but without grossness and with the plague blown away by the South-West wind. He wants men and women at play; at the delicate fencing of subtle lovers, not the "old game" that the Wife of Bath practised, but an interplay of intellect between the sexes, with passion merely present to give an extra warmth to the sunlight. Meredith's spirit turns longingly to the age of Louis Quatorze and the great Molière; he craves for a time when men and women knew how to fleet the time carelessly to the music of wit; he could even have put up with the maypole, with Hodge and his Audrey dancing round it. Instead, he got the nineteenth century, earnest even in the pursuit of its great gods, morality and wealth. His subjects, under Victoria and Albert, in this watery isle of green tilth that was being befouled by smoking factories, were great schoolmasters by nature, men who believed in the "established order," whether that be in business, in religion, in politics or science. George Eliot herself found it a melancholy affair, even though it satisfied her intelligence. But to Meredith, had he really lived in it, it would have meant spiritual extinction.

For the England of his day was made up of Puritans, Bacchanalians and Superior People. He liked none of these classes, except the second. The first he calls "agelasts," those who will not laugh because they associate all laughter with cakes and ale and such-like atrocities, being people who "need their pious exercises less than schooling in the pleasures"; the second, the Bacchanals, are jolly, tun-bellied folk with

a great Falstaffian wind about them, the best substitute for the witty exquisites for whom his spirit craved ; the last, the Superior People, are the worst of all, because they are the folk who cannot face the actual world, that very region which the Comic Spirit lives to reveal. The essence of all these classes, from the "creed-slave praying to the image in his box," up to the idealists and the rough laughers, is their heavy-handedness ; but the very quality of Comic pastry-making is to keep it light. No ; in this matter of the Time Spirit, as Carlyle would say, Meredith was badly served.

Born in the new industrial world, the world that held forth that banner of survival of the fittest in the forefront of its fight, he was out of true sympathy with the greater ideas of his age. His genius is for intellectual comedy, not for farce and the right old English stuff of beer, beef and the inn wench ; not for satire, or the delicate probe of irony, for in both these there is a vulture beak and much scent of carrion ; not for the romantic comedy of the green-wood and all manner of idyllic inventions. He strikes that last note sometimes, of course, but even the Diversion on a Penny Whistle, when Richard and Lucy taste the Apple of Eden in the shape of the dewberry, seems a trifle over-sweet to the mature, a trifle cloying in its melody.

It is when Meredith can carry us into the world of the wits that he is really master of himself ; and of us ; granted, that is, that we can breathe the clear, dry air where rapier-play in words can be so deadly, but where it never looks serious until—the moment.

Here, then, comes *The Egoist*, a drama close-walled in a park ; but not an English one, though there are trees and a pond in it, with hawthorns and such-like gauds of the May time ; but a park and a people made by Meredith out of his own brain, not cut out of solid earth. As a creator of personality he is only happy when he escapes from his own century and gets him away into some region, self-evolved, where the air is nimble and more clear by far than the smoky atmosphere of industrial and scientific England. Then he is to himself, and to his readers, a refuge from actuality. You may know, in fact, the true Meredithian by his taste in literature ; he regards books as a place of retreat from life. Meredith manu-

factures out of pure brain a habitat for himself ; he makes it as nearly like his conception of the age of the Great Louis as he can.

But this is not the same as saying that he withdraws from reality. For *The Egoist* in supreme degree, and in a more imperfect fashion, *Diana* and the other comedies, are true to the inner springs of character at any age of the world's history. It is only the outer world that is manufactured as a place in which these subjective truths can be made clear as they could not in a novel which insisted on the vraisemblance of time and place, such as these were in the nineteenth century. Feverel is a young man grasping at sweets : so is Sir Lukin ; a Vernon Whitford, a Redworth, are men of sanity and seated in the mean as they would be whether they made money by investments in railways or by enclosures ; or whether they "suspended judgment," and bided their hour as scholars or as soldiers.

The quintessence of subjective life is Meredith's true topic here, as always in his finer comic moments ; but it is impossible to maintain that life in the big house of any century is hit off at Raynham or at Patterne. And, notwithstanding Benson's "saurian" vigilance, and the phalanx of Sir Austin's supporters of the System, nothing on earth would actually have kept a young man so maidlike as he is shown in *The Ordeal*. This is not actuality at all ; neither in manners, nor talk, nor atmosphere in the English eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sir Lukin with his encircling arm is a very comic figure indeed, but no girl of the world would have been driven to such desperate expedients to escape it. Instead of a flesh-and-blood woman, with tooth and claws of her own, Meredith sees the quintessence of a woman, as she would be in some daintier world than that where women, as well as Sir Willoughby, actually have legs and can use them—to escape the wolf-pack. In *Diana*, Meredith is off, up above in the clouds, whence he shoots those arrows of laughter that he speaks of as coming down to earth in silvery peals. He has escaped his own heavy, flat-footed age ; and his Pegasus serves him well. He has fled to that world of which he speaks when he says : "Comedy is the fountain of sound sense : not the less perfectly sound on account of the sparkle." But to rise into that world implied



a *tour de force* of creative energy that was far greater than the effort of a Molière, who enjoyed the benefit of living in a time when actual life provided both the matter and the audience.

Meredith, then, heats the crucible of his imagination in order that he may collect the volatile essence of human nature. The result is that he seldom gives us the man through his work, his business, his profession. His true types are people of endless leisure ; not the strenuous folk who worked up the Great Exhibition. His gentlemen are county magnates and turn as naturally to their country seats as a pigeon to its home. And when Bernard Shaw declared that Meredith was a Rip Van Winkle because his social values were all wrong, he was speaking the simple truth in one sense. For social values to Shaw mean economic ones, but Meredith's weights and measures are spiritual ones, being those essential qualities of the soul that truly make up the inner value of a man.

In this department Meredith has done his most valuable work. He has widened our sense of the ego-centred man ; that is, of every man-jack of us. Meredith is the immortal sleuth-hound where the nature and make-up of our original being is concerned. His work here is foundational and will stand when ages yet to come have passed and gone. In his pursuit of egotism, the simple spring of personality as it is to-day, and sentimentalism, or the thing that egotism becomes when we seek to hide its nature from ourselves, Meredith's quality of intellectual acuteness is his strength. And, as Le Gallienne has pointed out, his use of metaphor is the great means by which he can express the inexpressible and paint the invisible. What he has to do is to show, by the tiniest flickering of the feelings, interpretations that go down to the deepest roots of the world of consciousness. In a sense there is nothing for him to "describe" ; he can only make us feel what he is painting by pictures of the things with which we are already familiar. Meredith's artistry is perfect in *The Egoist*, because he is there using the only possible method of dealing with his subject, the secret places of the unknown heart. His artistry fails often in other books because he is using metaphor to paint for us things that could quite well be described directly. This he himself realises when he comes to tragedy, for his



tragic scenes, such as the search for the body of Commander Beauchamp and the parting of Lucy and Richard, are as simple as art can make them. They are utterly unadorned.

*The Egoist*, with its haunting suggestion everywhere of porcelain, is as conventional, as Chinese, as a pattern that goes back thousands of years. It is also one of the most tremendous books in our language—a book that makes a real turning-point in our realisation of personality; this time, in its depths. It is conventional art, for everyone in it plays an age-old part, a part as old as the prim figures on any willow-pattern plate; and yet in such a design we have not merely the flaying of a soul, but the reduction of it to pure shadow. Sir Willoughby, when Meredith leaves him, is still a great county magnate outwardly; inwardly he is what matter becomes to the mind that sees it as a whirl in the ether. Sir Willoughby is the ego-centred being of this self-conscious dispensation in which we now live; he is pure and undiluted egotism. Meredith lays bare with his laughter, not his scalpel, layer below layer of craving nerves. Then at the centre there is just a whirl of the void. And we behold Sir Willoughby; and in him ourselves.

He is the converse to Walt Whitman's "universal man." For what Walt tries to do is to expand and expand the consciousness of one man till it embraces the world of stars and men, of atoms and powers. But here, in *The Egoist*, is the unexpanded man. Scores of times does Meredith play on the same theme, in young men and old ones. The great work performed by his genius for comedy is to show "the stench of the trail of Ego in our History," whether that "History" be the European stage or the heart of an English squire.

But the egoist is bearable beside that much more filthy animal, the sentimentalist. This being is in Meredith's comedy a creature who plays the vampire just as zestfully as ever the egoist did, but each time he drains another's life-blood he draws round himself a cloak of holy purpose. The egoist is frankness itself beside this being of hypocrisy who is prepared to be so good—in a perfect world. Pending the arrival of that world, he lives as other men do, fighting for his own hand. The egoist never looks in any glass, but the sentimentalist is always posing before the mirror of his own beautiful nature.

Meredith's comedy is a scene of leisured and wealthy ease, yet its spirit is more ruthless than the rough-and-tumble theatre of the passions.

Tragedy is with Meredith a thing dragged in, rather than inevitable, though when he reaches the scene he is masterly. Yet we feel it is forced on us perversely ; that it is by no means unfolded by destiny. That is why the end of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, poignant though it may be, is yet a sort of outrage. That the ill-starred lovers should die as a result of any System, however foolish, is absurd. Nor is it made easier for us by the opening scenes which strike a note of farce ; of very delightful farce, of course, as when Richard is precipitated into passion by the austere salute on Lady Blandish's hand. Not thus did Shakespeare play his prelude to the lovers in Verona. Yet tragedy calls forth what is so rare in Meredith—his lucidity and simplicity. He avoids that dreadful trick of mannerism which will make him write " not a sign of the torch in the blood " when he wishes to refer to a blush. For Meredith's greatest and most characteristic work in comedy was, as it were, wrenched from his inner being in defiance of the setting of the actual in which he found himself living. This gives to his style a sense of strain which would have been absent had he breathed the air of a lighter and more witty age. Meredith never enjoyed, like Shakespeare, the zest of being carried along by the wind of national aspiration, or, like Molière, by the zephyrs of a highly cultivated social order. He lived instead in a century which was beginning to face the problems of an ordered philosophy of life ; and beginning it, too, in a spirit of deadly seriousness. His reactions to this are shown more clearly in his poetry than in his fiction.

The hardest thing ever written about Meredith was said by his greatest critic, for it is Mr. G. M. Trevelyan who remarks that Meredith's novels were written by the poet in him, and his poems by the novelist. But if this were really true, we should not be troubling ourselves about him at this time of day. For novels, when they live, are written by novelists, and poems by poets, and to reckon otherwise is simply to expect to gather figs of thistles. *The Egoist* is, whatever Mr. Trevelyan may say, the work of a man who had an inward drama to unfold by means of a narrative of more or less plausible

events ; that is, by a novelist. The poet in Meredith is here in the background, though he does peep out once or twice, especially when he sets "the rogue in porcelain" against a background of summer sky. In the famous walk, too, which Richard Feverel took through the Rhineland forest when the leveret licked his hand, and the rain poured down in floods, the poet awakes, through Nature's heart, the springs of human pity and tenderness. None but a poet could have written this, a poet to whom Nature is more beneficent than humanity.

Meredith could rejoice unfeignedly in Nature and could gaily bring her in to play a part in the human story, because he was, in the main, insensitive to pain. Pain to him was—very coolly—but a part of the process by which life moves towards the creation of "certain nobler races." The end, to him, justified the means. And that is all he thinks about it. Christ is, therefore, to him not the figure they took down from the Cross, whose very face in death after torture could "make unbelievers," in Dostoevsky's phrase ; He is simply "the man-loving Nazarene." Nor is the pain of the animal creation more vivid to Meredith ; he savours the joy of a fox-hunt like any old hunting squire. For this sense of the pain of creation, this "twilight view," came in with the Middle Classes. And Meredith, being an aristocrat by tendency, and a man of good health, with a taste for walking and good cookery, yodels aloud of the joys of earth. He sees "feasting to come" from Earth,

" Who gives us the man-loving Nazarene,  
The martyrs, the poets, the corn and the vines."

Was there ever before such a comprehensive list of the joys of Earth as this, with martyrs cheek by jowl with vines, and all brought forth by a being "red in tooth and claw" ? But Meredith, a master of the paradoxical in style, was in himself one of the most amusing paradoxes that ever walked on two legs. For his ideal is that of the man "seated in the mean" ; he acclaims common sense, and defines it as the capacity for steering between the rocks of asceticism and the whirlpools of sensuality. Finally, he writes that amazing piece of complacency : "our civilisation is founded on common sense, and



it is the first condition of sanity to believe it." He had no idea that the author of *Penguin Island* would one day write, with the approval of many of his fellows, this pregnant passage: "Do you see, my son," he exclaimed, "that madman who with his teeth is biting the nose of the adversary he has overthrown and that other one who is pounding a woman's head with a huge stone?" "I see them," said Bulloch. "They are creating law; they are founding property; they are establishing the principles of civilisation, the basis of society, and the foundations of the State."

Other times, other thoughts, of course.

But this man who regards history as an expression in the main of sanity, who glorified common sense, was acclaimed as a strange thinker and even denied a place in Westminster Abbey for his strange thinking. Yet he merely expresses in unusual language the most usual view about life, a view that is held by the average man of the world. He sees, as does the man of most ordinary thought, that there is a mingling of good and evil in the world; that there is, on the whole, a working upward towards a better state of existence. Nature has herself worked upward; we have now to aid her blind efforts by our thinking powers. That is all we know; or can know. We must not pry into secrets, either of the dim future for the race, or for the possible, but unlikely, fact of personal immortality.

"What is dumb  
We question not, nor ask  
The silent to give sound,  
The hidden to unmask,  
The distant to draw near."

Of all the enormous vistas that open before the dreaming soul of man, Meredith enjoys not one. For him there is no conquest of the great Darkness. That being dark now, will remain dark. Only, whether one be a *Juggling Jerry* or *A Daughter of Hades*, one should enjoy what is, taking care to leave, of course, a "less tumbled house" for those who come after. Death is only a process of birth. You will find it so in Nature, of whom you are a part, just a part with a little sentience.



“ Earth knows no desolation  
She smells regeneration  
In the moist breath of decay.”

For all his love of the lively Celt, Meredith is typically Saxon. He would have us go on hammering away at the vessel of civilisation without being audacious enough to inquire as to what port she is sailing. This man shares none of the audacities either of his own age or of ours. And to him, industrial England getting wealthy through the smoke of grimy cities, and training her brood to fight in protection of her wealth, is part of the beautiful process of betterment which began with the jungle law. It is our job, as men, to carve life; not to ask why we do it.

“ Our questions are a mortal brood,  
Our work is everlasting.  
We children of Beneficence  
Are in its being sharers;  
And Whither vainer sounds than Whence  
For word with such wayfarers.”

It is true that hitherto we have made rather a rough job of that carving of Life, for he finds her still—

“ a shape in stone,  
Sword-hacked and iron-stained, with breasts of clay,  
And metal veins that sometimes flery shine;  
O! Life, how naked and how hard when known.  
Yet Life says: ‘ As thou hast carved me, such am I.’ ”

In that lies Meredith's famous optimism; Life is, and can only be, what “ we ” have made it. There is no Immanent Will to be considered, with Hardy; no Destiny, with the Greeks. Only a Nature that, though it works through “ crimson mire,” is friendly to man, and in him shows a growing ethical sense. There is in all the world but one Power greater than man; that is the Great Mother of the wheat and the rose, of birth and death.

This is a neat system, free from vague mysticism, or vague promise. Only twice in all his poems did Meredith get out of the circle of this purely earth-bound reading of life. That is

in *The Hymn to Colour* and in the curious undertone of *The Woods of Westermmain*.

In the "haunted roods" of these strange poems Meredith feels the presence of new aspirations and, perhaps, of new visions. The Unseen is about his heart when he writes, in *The Hymn to Colour*, of the spiritual glory which is sometimes lent to earthly things by Love. Meredith is here struggling, like any other poet, to express the inexpressible, that sense of an unknown greatness which seems to await the future of man. Of this Colour, or Love, he writes the great phrase :—

" He gives her homeliness in desert air,  
And sovereignty in spaciousness ; he leads  
Through widening chambers of surprise to where  
Throbs rapture near an end that aye recedes,  
Because his touch is infinite and lends  
A yonder to all ends."

In that "Fount of the Untimed," once, at least, Meredith rises to the heights that Shelley knew ; and in the superb phrase "widening chambers of surprise" he for once faces the reality of earth, as great poets see it, for he touches the fringe of that sense of timelessness breaking through time in human affairs which makes up their heritage of splendid vision. The same sense, but on a lower level of passion, rustles in the coverts of those woods at Westermmain.

Of that passion which is "noble strength on fire," Meredith had much, but he uses it mainly in two directions ; first, in individual personality, where he analyses to the very last fibre the nature of the root of conscious life which is egotism ; and second, in the personality of the race, in which he unravels the thread of earth on which everything human is strung. His principle is always that of struggle, and to him God is just the good in Nature that struggles into light. He revels in the survival of the fittest, chuckling over the fallen in *The Shaving of Shagpat* :—

" Lo ! of hundreds who aspire,  
Eighties perish,—nineties tire !  
They who bear up, in spite of wrecks and wracks,  
Were season'd by celestial hail of thwacks."

And what is true of authors, is true of all beasts and men.

Meredith has no illusions as to the inner nature of all personality ; nor of the vigorous process by which our earthiness is transmuted. And *Woe to the Vanquished* is to him but a fine battle-cry.

Of such is the Kingdom where the strong grow yet stronger. From it Meredith's only means of escape was the Comic Spirit.





*PART V*  
**THE WRECKERS**

CHAPTER I.—IBSEN

CHAPTER II.—TOLSTOI

CHAPTER III.—TURGENEV

CHAPTER IV.—TCHEHOV

CHAPTER V.—ANATOLE FRANCE



## CHAPTER I

### IBSEN

THE symbol chosen for Ibsen's grave is a workman's hand wielding a hammer. Since the hammer is a tool that both builds and destroys, it was a true inspiration that set it there. For Ibsen was the man who not only struck away the spiritual supports of the social system but devoted a long life unswervingly to the task of creating personalities that are both a challenge of to-day and a criticism of to-morrow. He did more ; he showed what creative effort means, what it costs to live in two worlds at once and to lend to the cold realities of thought the bounding life of nerve-thrill and blood-flow. It is Ibsen who opens the door for us into the workshop where this activity reigns, so that one catches glimpses of those hammer-strokes by which he made, not replicas of nature's efforts, but characters who rival nature and serve as models to the personalities of a world yet to be. It is not a full revelation ; the door opens only for a second, but in that moment a flood of light is thrown, not on Ibsen, but on mental work as it is in itself.

Himself he could not show ; he was and is " the great solitary," of whom he says : " I am conscious, in personal intercourse, of only being able to give incorrect expression to what lies deepest in me and constitutes my real self ; therefore I prefer to lock it up." It remains locked ; you may learn that he sewed on his own buttons, and did the job badly, that he lived in furnished rooms most of his life, owning nothing but a few pictures bought as an investment, that he enjoyed the thrill of a lottery, loved orders and decorations of honour, dressed like a diplomat and tramped the Papal States with a knapsack ; you may look at his portrait and note the impression it gives of pugnacity, vitality, and strength, with its

small piercing eyes, electric mane of hair and thin lips ; you may imagine the grim smile and the kindly of which his friend Brandes speaks, but you never " feel " this man, as you feel Dickens or Fielding, or the great Russians. He made others, himself he could not make ; this man who forged those thought-created figures which seem to cast the shadows of real men and women, possessed no witchcraft by which to show himself. The reason is, of course, that he lived, literally, but to create ; everything he was, he used in his work. Mentally he resembles a being that reproduces, not by the secretion of a germ-cell, but by fission of the parent organism. The creative work of most artists seems but a by-product of their lives ; they throw off works of art as carelessly as most men beget children. This begetting may be a man's most important act between birth and death, but he does not himself see it in this light. He plays about, and the result that follows he regards as the mere effect of powers over which he has exercised the smallest possible measure of control.

It was not so with Ibsen, who used his life but for one purpose—to produce. He seems, at moments, to have gone even further and to have caught a vision of the whole panorama of physical life as that which exists but to serve creation on the mental plane, as though we may some day look back on life on this planet as having been merely part of the process by which was produced the ideal over-world. Looking for a moment at what Ibsen tells us of the genesis of *Brand*, we shall see something of how this principle may be supposed to work.

Ibsen left Norway, not only in a rage at the hypocrisy of his country, but suffering from that mood of mingled joy and misery which heralds for the artist the promise of a new creation. At Berlin he saw the triumphal entry of the Prussian army after the defeat of the Danes, that was followed by the annexation of Schleswig-Holstein. Whilst he watched the mob spitting into the captured cannon, a madness seized him and—the god descended on him. *Brand* grew within him " like an embryo." His genius, already struggling in the grip of the tremendous problem of free-will and world-will and heavily shadowed by that darkness of the fjords where no sunlight pierces " from fall of leaf till cuckoo-call,"



had received the quickening thrill from the spectacle of imperialist tyranny. In Rome, free at that time from the triple curse of politics, commercialism and militarism, among a people "indescribably beautiful and sound and calm," and warmed by the sunshine of the South, the embryo grew to birth. So that to the making of *Brand* there went, not merely the will of Ibsen, but the acrid bitterness of the rock-bound folk; the war of god and devil that comes to such places in the guise of a religious revival; the world-wide imperialistic trend of that day's politics, and the whole force of that Dionysus who ripens the swelling grape, and makes genius to bear as abundantly as a vine. Here is external life combining to serve the expression of man's mind. To this effect millions of humble lives contributed, innumerable comedies and tragedies were played.

This view, however, represents the poet himself as merely the vehicle or matrix used by the creative force. The rock-folk, the Hohenzollerns, and the southern graciousness are tools of the world-will, but so is Ibsen himself. Yet with the entry of the maker, the poet, into the chain of causes, unconsciousness ends and Ibsen brings to the task a definite, self-directed will, that, while sharing in the work of the world-purpose, yet enjoys the illusion, at any rate, of being able to fulfil or to thwart it. This moment of personal intervention comes as a restless fever. Ibsen writes: "During the time I was writing *Brand* I had on my desk a glass with a scorpion in it. From time to time the little animal was ill. Then I used to give it a piece of soft fruit upon which it fell furiously and emptied its poison into it—after which it was well again. Does not something of the same kind happen with us poets?"

More than once he speaks of the relief that comes with the throwing-off of a creation. "It was a necessity for me to free myself," he says, "from something which my inner man had done with, by giving poetic form to it." Yet there is joy, too, in the first hours when sight comes of a new world of the creative imagination. It is the mingled sense of humility and glory, of shrinking and acceptance that we call annunciation. To this honour, to this distressful strife, am I called—again?

To this fruit-bearing Ibsen devoted himself, body and soul. Storm-lover that he was, it was the North that made him.

This he knew. The mother of *Peer Gynt*, that poignant picture of weakness and fancifulness, of old age and the passing of mortal things, was his own mother; he tells us so. Yet he never saw her again after he first left Norway, never wrote to her, and when the news of her death reaches him, "so our dear old mother is dead," he writes to his sister Hedwig. "I thank you for having so lovingly fulfilled the duties that were incumbent on us all." That is all. There was the narrowness of biblical piety in his home which would have cramped his spirit, so he turned his back on it for ever, yet used its inspiration. We can only understand if we know *Brand*, for that is "myself in my best moments," as he says. This attitude towards all claims is that of a man stripping for a race. "Friends," says he, "are an expensive luxury, and when a man's whole capital is invested in a calling and a mission in life, he cannot afford to keep them." His quarrel with Björnson is for wasting on a thousand schemes of reform that precious energy which was given for creation only. To George Brandes he writes: "What I chiefly desire for you is a genuine, full-blooded egoism, which shall force you for a time to regard what concerns you yourself as the only thing of any consequence, and everything else as non-existent. . . . There is no way in which you can benefit society more than by coining the metal you have in yourself."

To coin the metal you have in yourself; that is, to create an ideal world out of the external by marrying it to the interior self, that "metal" whose song of creation rings so often through the plays as it awaits the miner, the man who shall bring it out of darkness into light. All the joy of the race's energy is here, from the genius that first used wind to fill the sail, or steam to move the wheel, up to the power that traces consciousness back to its source and then, with superb insolence, uses that consciousness to make new models of personality, rounder and more complete than the nature of him who gave them birth. "There is no way in which you can benefit society more than by coining the metal you have in yourself"; the race, in its pioneers, has always known this, or it would never have pushed out from the darkness. But what is new and defiant, at any rate in England, is the frank application of the principle, not to the material plane on which

fortunes can be made, but to the immaterial world on which new ideals can alone be captured. This egotism, though in an Edison it would be praiseworthy, seems unpardonable in an Ibsen. Not only is a stark "All or Nothing" inconceivable to the inertia of the mass, but they have no idea of the fact that action takes place first in the world of the ideal.

But what Ibsen saw was a perpetual interchange of the physical plane with the mental; life with him was one, whether in the causative region or the phenomenal. And, as Life works at her loom, there is incessant shifting from one plane to the other. This explains the mysticism that in Ibsen is to Brandes but a remnant of the national romanticism out of which he has to grow. But, in fact, Ibsen never grew out of it: it rules at Rosmersholm, it is in *The Wild Duck*, in *Little Eyolf*, and merges at last in the almost pure symbolism of one of the last plays, *The Master Builder*. The unseen waits, in Ibsen's view, so close behind the seen that at any moment it may appear, in its own proper form, as the force which moves events. Usually we only see the material unrolling as it is woven, but now and again we catch a glimpse of the loom itself. And so death as the rat-wife takes a hand in the deal with human temperaments, and the forces of tradition play their part as the white horses of Rosmersholm, when Rebecca opens out a new tract of the spiritual. This mysticism is not so much an intrusion on reality as a permeation of it. It works sometimes as personification, as in the great Boyg of *Peer Gynt* which "conquers in all things by yielding"; sometimes by symbolism, as when Aline mourns the nine burnt dolls that stood to her for the bodies and souls of the children that were not, but most powerfully when some great spiritual force becomes one with Nature itself, as when the wildness of liberty is not to be distinguished from the wind of the open sea.

Ibsen's work is best understood by dividing it into three periods: first, the stage of ferment which culminated in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*; second, the period of intense realism when he looked at the world as it is; and third, the time when he turned from the world without to the world within. The second stage begins with *The Doll's House* and the third with *Little Eyolf*. At the close of the first stage, which ends in the two allegorical dramas of will, Ibsen emerges as having taken



his stand in regard to life ; in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* he gives us the result of that process of distillation by which his essential nature has been discovered. For Ibsen is not, like Tolstoi, a man who changes his spiritual angles more than once ; he has one thing to say and he spends his life in saying it. It is " FIND THYSELF."

Over the age that was heralded by the glorious promise of Greek civilisation it has been said that the motto should be written : " Know thyself." But in pure disregard of what the Greeks believed and practised, man has turned aside from " knowing " himself to explore matter with a view to wealth-making. Thus he has lost himself, can no longer take the first step towards realising himself. And therefore, over the age that the European iconoclasts of the seventies and eighties of last century hacked to bits in the ideal world and that has finally crashed to the ground in the war of 1914, it has been necessary to write : " FIND THYSELF." It was Ibsen who first wrote it clearly.

But the writing of this brought him at once into conflict with the Christian command, " Be unselfish ; seek not your own," to which men had paid lip-service for so many generations. He was, therefore, labelled immoral, and retaliated by the picture of a society poisoned at its springs in *The Enemy of the People*, as before he had shown that the individual who has not found himself must go to the Button-moulder and be melted down again, since he is not even fit for a decent hell where, at any rate, men knew what they are. It was true, of course, that men had never been unselfish, but ever since Christianity began had been spending their strength in seeking their own. Still—they worshipped an ideal, as did Dr. Stockmann's fellow-townsmen when they loudly vaunted the value of health.

Against both the ideal and the practice Ibsen flung himself, using that grim power of detecting hollowness which he had first learnt among the Norwegians, those rock-folk who greeted the heroic—nay, the merely honest—with a cheer, but only on feast-days when the champagne was flowing. These people, says Ibsen, must find themselves, must discover a self with which to be unselfish, before they can judge either in ethics or politics.



But when I am told to find myself and set about doing so, I discover that I have no idea what self is. I am like someone looking in a dark room for what isn't there. And so submerged are we now in the idea of possession that all we can see in the whole moral field is that we must not seek our own things: must not inordinately love—possession. Being as empty within as a drum, we are—to remain empty. And that being an impossibility, because of the law of the seven devils, we disobey our own rule and gorge ourselves with possession.

Ibsen sets forth this situation by the plays of the second period; in them he showed what happens, not to the individual only, but to society when a man or woman has never found the self, has never realised it, never lived it. His was, and is, the most destructive criticism ever applied to the social organism. Because of its very simplicity, it bit home. Two plays, the *Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, threw down the gage of battle: Nora leaves her duties because, having never found herself, she cannot but corrupt her children; Mrs. Alving, who does not leave her duties, becomes worse than a murderess, because, to give life to disease and madness is worse than the mere ending of life. *Ghosts* is unanswerable because it does not discuss anything, as Brieux does. Pastor Manders finds no answer to it, and no one ever has. It is because there is no answer to it that Ibsen is still called pathological; that is to say, his intelligence was so healthy that he convicted society of disease. And in the name of law and order, of decorum, society objects to being diagnosed, to that proud declaration of Nora's: "I must find out who is right, society or I," and flings names at the man who did find out. *Ghosts*, one must suppose, has yet to be read by those upholders of the English divorce laws to whom every marriage is sacred, whatever the vile facts of it may be, provided it has fulfilled the legal forms. For the lie that poisons the sources of life is sexual, but if one goes farther one finds, as we are doing to-day, that the lie sexual merges in the lie economic, and that again in the lie political. "I wanted," said Mrs. Alving, "only to pick at a single knot, but when I had got that undone, the whole thing unravelled out. And then I understood it was all machine-sewn."

And so it is. "There are actually moments," says Ibsen,

"when the whole history of the world appears to me like one great shipwreck, and the only important thing seems to be to save oneself." For he comes to the conclusion that until a man has found the purpose within him for which he stands, he is a centre of foul corruption; and society itself has become rotten, not only by these sporadic centres of plague, the unfound selves, but even more by the way in which the theory of "unselfishness" has been elevated into an ideal. Unselfishness that is worth having is service by a great, a dominant self, and self-abnegation apart from that is, in a spiritual sense, the crime of self-murder: a man is no man at all until he knows what he stands for and until he has decided, in the pursuit of his object, everything must be swept aside. To the objection that a man may stand for what is evil, Ibsen's answer, like that of all strong men, is that only by living his purpose out can the man learn what is ultimately evil and what is good. But your half-man learns nothing; he is too good to stand for anything, and must go to the Button-moulder. Everyway we have been poisoned by half-men.

It is in his third period, where symbolism gradually conquers and the action of the plays is almost at once merged in mental analysis, that the great individualist turns to deal with the question that has been in the background of his mind all through: How is individualism, that supreme expression of the man, without which there is no man, to be reconciled with the spirit of solidarity without which the human race cannot achieve its purpose? "So to conduct one's life as to realise oneself—this seems to me the highest attainment possible to a human being." This, that Ibsen wrote to Björnson, was to him always the truth. For the boast of man is ultimately this: "I am unique, whoever I am, for through me alone, can the World-Will find itself—in one of its channels of expression. If I go unexpressed for ever, then one aspect of the life-force must also go unexpressed for ever." This is strange teaching to a world that, shouting self-denial, self-abnegation, has lived but for one purpose, to heap up possessions.

The sole sign of health to-day is that some of us are beginning to be ashamed of the belly-crawling humility of ideal that has been, fitly enough, combined with the purpose of the man with the muck-rake. We begin to understand, as Brandes did

not, what he wrote of Ibsen—"the one thing he really believes in and respects is personality"; that is, the self-realisation of the man who has found himself. Find yourself, says Ibsen, and all the rest shall be added unto you, even a healthy social system. If you live a lie, even if you persist in it for the supposed well-being of the whole, you are doing evil to all. But generally to apply this principle is to cause the dissolution of society as it now is. For—"do you believe that what is worm-eaten has any real power of resistance?"

But if society is dissolved, what becomes of that principle of collectivism which runs parallel all through the human story with the principle of individualism? When these two are reconciled, even though it be at infinity, the third kingdom of which Ibsen wrote in *Emperor and Galilean* will be at hand. We should like to see some indication of the way in which this reconciliation may be effected.

In his third period of *Little Eyolf*, *The Master Builder* and *John Gabriel Borkman*, Ibsen turns his attention to this question. The conclusion to which he comes—at times—is very simple: it is that human nature turns as naturally towards joy and satisfaction as a plant towards light. At first it seeks this joy by injuring others—and the joy fails to satisfy. Ultimately it learns—through infinite experiment, which is where the Button-moulder comes in—that it can only find satisfaction when it acts for the good of others. The world-will works towards its own full satisfaction through the *bonté primitive* of each unit. *Little Eyolf* is created by selfish passion, by two who had only taken the first step towards finding themselves, and through his unregarded life his parents learn the great law. They turn, through the service of children, upwards. They face "a heavy day of work" in developing themselves in service. It is a picture, in brief, of the racial task, because it is the reconciliation of egotism and collectivism, development for full service.

That this statement of the doctrine, "Find thyself," has been expressed by Ibsen mainly in his women characters has been a puzzle to his critics, particularly to those male critics to whom a more or less kindly contempt for women is second nature. For it is only men of first-rate calibre who understand the potentialities of women's position. Mr. Ellis Roberts,



however, who roundly states that Ibsen's bias towards women's power is a misfortune, yet gives one of the true reasons for the stressing of the woman as the emergent spirit of the new time. It is, he says, because nowhere except among the poor, the criminals and the women could Ibsen find a class of natural individualists. That is true. Men, not women, have built the state in its present form. Women have been merely used as the centre of the arch for which the structure was built. For all through history, but especially during the age of machine-production, women have been the class that has offered itself to the highest bidder as the most expensive commodity that wealth could buy, while at the same time professing and often practising excessive self-abnegation and self-sacrifice. At its extremes the sex has excelled in courtesans and saints, and in both rôles has delighted the male—sometimes the same male. That is the extent of their crime, one due to apathy, to the line of least resistance principle. They have acquiesced in man's plan for them, but underneath they have preserved the power to laugh at form and ceremony; at that law and order which is the fetish of the man.

This is certainly one reason why Ibsen considered it conceivable that it would be woman, not man, who would first awake and find her own soul. Another reason is certainly that, if an honest world is ever to be built, we must begin with the springs of life, with the new generations as they appear on the stage. And woman works in life itself. It takes something more than mere begetting to make a human being, and over that making of a man the woman's soul broods. Poisoning here is poisoning the spring at its source. And spiritual reality begins with honesty, with beginning at the beginning, with a man's self. How can he build a real world who is not himself real? Real men mean real mothers, but now every generation is spoilt by the corruption of its guardians, its guardians who have been deliberately corrupted. The only beginning anew that has the slightest chance is—beginning with the women. That is why that banging of the door in *The Doll's House* reverberated through Europe, why *Ghosts* sent a shiver through the moralists who have for so long been engaged in their favourite occupation of painting corruption and calling it sound. And even now it is not on record that



the Board of Education has specially advised a course of Ibsen in every girls' school in the country. Ibsen, at any rate, had no doubt that, if society was to be saved, it would be saved by the women. To the Norwegian Feminist Society he said frankly in 1898: "it is the women who will solve the problem of humanity. They will do it as mothers. And it is solely in their capacity as mothers that they will succeed."

But the question must needs arise here as to whether the women of Ibsen's plays have anywhere their models—it is his own word—in actual life. And if one looks out over the world of women to-day, voting or voteless, one would say: "No, Ibsen's women are not the women I see here." For the old are complacent and buried in purely narrow cares, and the young are as conventional as their education—except in self-indulgence. Neither old nor young are alert as Ibsen's women are, both in goodness and badness. But we know now where Ibsen found the originals of the two types of women he painted, the strong purposeful woman and the devoted one whose self is expressed only in the "love-life" and when that has been killed the woman, too, is dead.

He found the former type in his wife, Susanna Thoresen, and the latter in her sister, Marie. His wife, who alone approved of *Love's Comedy*, his satire on conventional marriage, he describes in these words: "she is exactly the character desiderated by a man of mind—she is illogical, but has a strong poetic instinct, a broad and liberal mind, and an almost violent antipathy to all petty considerations."

To how many women in the plays is not that last phrase a clue? Fru Ibsen is the Silent Woman, *par excellence*, of literature, but her silence yet speaketh and louder far than the tongue or the pen of the many speaking women. On that strong soul, and on that of her sister, playing infinite variations on what he saw, Ibsen built his earlier women, whereas the zest and freakish frankness of the younger generation was caught partly from Emilie Bardach of Vienna, and partly, no doubt, from those sheaves and sheaves of letters he received from the women whom Fru Ibsen warned him to keep at arm's length.

But this new conception of woman and her place, the impetus to which was first given in Ibsen's mind by Fru Clara

Collett, the novelist, was but part of the general movement then setting in towards individualism, or that principle of "Find thyself." And it is a psychological fact that, although you may find a Hedda Gabler by observation, you will only discover Nora, Mrs. Alving, Lona Hassel, Gina, Hilda, Ellida, Ella Rentheim and the greatest of them all, Rebecca West, where Ibsen found them—in a woman's heart. You need not go far to find the heart, if you are a woman. Your own will do. For these women may not yet be out in the world, but their spiritual counterparts are in being. Go deeper and yet deeper, and you will certainly find women whose honesty is the foundation of their natures. And honesty is the one feature Ibsen's great women have in common.

For Ibsen is not of those who despair of the stuff of life. Society, as he sees it, is built on rotten foundations, but a revolution in the spirit of man—of which he does not despair as long as there are women in existence—will change all that. This man with a hammer shares with women, in fact, that trust in the purposes of the Life-Force without which they could not have continued all down the ages to brood over the origins of life. He lived in a century when the energy of self-expression was turning from form to consciousness: that being so, he could not but foresee that a great part was to be played by woman. For form is a male expression of vitality, while woman is regarded to this day as an enigma largely because the consciousness through which she lives most vividly cannot shape itself to sight.

In his three stages, Solness, the Master Builder, built churches, houses for men to live in, and, finally, houses with steeples. The last it was that killed him. Nor is the symbolism here without application to Ibsen's life. For when he climbed high up the steeple which was his idealism, he often turned giddy, often could see nothing "out beyond" but cloud. Does he base his hope for a sound society on woman? It is true, but does he not also realise that there is no creature on earth more instinctively earth-bound than she?

For the problem is this: the human beings who will save the world must be dominant personalities and yet must use their power for the common good. But woman is a creature subservient, even more than man, to blind instincts; a being

of sex, she allows herself to be used and therefore does not direct. She is a straw in so many currents, used by passion, used by idealism, used by greed, herself a prize for greed and an inspirer of greed. Åse, at the very start, trains Peer to escape from reality by telling lies to himself; Dora is a plaything; Mrs. Alving lives but to lie, and complains when it is all too late; Hedda Gabler shrinks from living, because she has no notion of what to live may mean; Rita is a sensualist whose child has to die to wake her; Hilda is a child with a healthy conscience who uses it as a bird of prey. Ella Rentheim is a mere tool. In all the plays only two women freely act and freely choose, and both are freed by a man. Ellida, the lady from the sea, being tossed into air, finds her wings and—herself. That is what Ibsen says—free her, and she will save. She must take her own way, find her own genius. But man must free her. And that is the devil of it, because at bottom she is the creature he fears more than anything else. When she refuses to be used, she is at the turning of the ways: it is her motherhood that will teach her then which way to take. But man as an idealist makes the sort of fool of himself that Gregers Werrle did when he thrust his “truths” down everybody’s throat. The central woman figure in each play is tested by the mother spirit, taking that to mean care and guardianship: Agnes in *Brand* dies, torn between the claims of physical and spiritual motherhood; Åse worships this principle in lies and Solveig in truth; Dora is potential motherhood; Hedda, shrinking from life, commits spiritual murder of the man who has been mothered by her rival; Gina, the cast-off mistress, is the only one in a mad group who keeps her feet on the solid rock of sanity through her gift for motherhood; Rita is ultimately saved by a revolution of her spirit brought about by the intervention of a child. Ibsen, the pathologist, is in fact the supreme creator of the woman as mother; he has been misunderstood simply because, in his view, the true mother is a master spirit, dominant, far-seeing, because she always faces the to-come and “the dark o’ the world.” And men have, in general, never thought of motherhood, or of womanhood, in such terms as these.

But Rebecca West, the second woman who finds her freedom in the plays, sums up the whole: she is the alpha and



omega of womanhood. Through infinitely degraded ways she comes to mastery, through lawless love, through murder and passionate egotism, she rises stage by stage to dominance of intellect, to the realisation of a spiritual ideal and to final sacrifice in the service of that ideal. She rises, led by the man who is to her, first, inspirer, then leader, and finally, the being led—because he has supreme need of her greatness. Ibsen is in love with beauty in its highest form, the spiritual: he finds the ultimate possibilities of this in the woman, the mother-spirit, that may be. His personalities move in mental air; they cannot disregard the question of moral values. Gone is the earlier golden world and Rosalind has given place to Rebecca. We cannot fleet the time carelessly any more in Ibsen's world because in it we realise that "that man is right who has allied himself most closely with the future." Never has misunderstanding of a master mind been more tragic than in Ibsen's case.

He lived so strangely close to the future that his prophecies of public events have been often curiously fulfilled. Of France in 1871 he says: "The old, illusory France has collapsed, and as soon as the new real Prussia does the same, we shall be with one bound in the new age. How ideas will then come tumbling about our ears. . . ." Again, of Russia he says: "a splendid country! think of all the grand oppression they have!—only think of the glorious love of liberty it engenders." Of the Paris Commune he writes in 1871: "The idea is ruined for many a day. Yet it has a sound kernel, that I see clearly; and some day it will be put into practice without any caricature." Looking into the far distant future, the great individualist says this: "The State must be abolished. In that revolution I will take part . . . the State has its root in Time: it will have its culmination in Time. Greater things than it will fall; all religion will fall. Neither the conceptions of morality nor those of art are eternal."

This is the spirit of the man who goes on, who cannot see men bounded by limits, but who is, when inland, always sick, like his Lady from the Sea, for the great winds and tides, for that mysterious interweaving of life and death, of present, past and future which consciousness presents to those who question her most persistently. He trusts himself like a bird



in air to the infinite possibilities of experience: "who will vouch for it that two and two do not make five in Jupiter?" With every new play he produced there was left "a tolerably compact crowd," but he himself was no longer there; he was elsewhere, farther ahead.

It is perhaps because he moved so quickly that we cannot feel him as a person. He is like the sea and sky: it is impossible to grasp him.

## CHAPTER II

### TOLSTOI

THE English taste for the cult of the Galahad in its heroes was never more useful than in the case of Leo Tolstoi. For he, being complex, had yet to speak with power in the ears of the simple-minded. This required that his personality should be drawn on classic, not on Gothic, lines. It was, the Western writers who granted him this boon. They did it by suppressing contradictory and subtle details; by excising gargoyles, so to say, and in general by ignoring the rich umbrageous design of the whole human structure. Thus was his message delivered to the masses, and, through the irony of fate, by the power of a half-truth. In the case, then, of this great truth-teller the good he did was by no means "interred with his bones," but rather raised into a fiery cross to summon men to the war against sin. And so we Northerners, a true people of the mist, have shaped Leo Tolstoi as a Saint and built him out of our respect for righteousness and especially out of our own lust for action. But to make the Saint we had to shroud the bare form of this gigantic Slav in the garments of our own idealism. The limelight has therefore been thrown on the preacher and prophet, on the plain man challenging society to face the living God and reform its ways. In his soul Tolstoi was a man of the East, laying all stress on sanctity, but it is as a typical man of the West, as one who instantly turns holiness into good deeds, that we love best to contemplate him.

This picture of our manufacture is a source of great satisfaction to us. And rightly so, for if we can re-create a Tolstoi of such noble, simple lines, we must needs possess within ourselves a potential nobility that, so far, has not seen the light in action.

What we have done with the Saint of Yasnaya Polyana is—to leave out the earth in him. Tolstoi “Englished” is simply a man crucified by society, a man who says, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me”; he is the modern exemplar to a crazy, war-stricken Europe. But in fact he is also the grey, grim, earthy figure of Gorki’s reminiscences. We have partially understood Tolstoi’s gospel, and, as he himself did, have found it too hard. But we have not grasped the significance of his personality because we refuse to acknowledge its blemishes and so cannot see it in relation to the scheme of things; that is, to evolution. To get this view we must needs fuse the Slav idea of him with our own. He is a Saint who fought for sanctity as few men have fought; he is an artist who despised art; he is a teacher who preached morality and despised reform. But he is more than this, for he cannot even be set like other characters in his allotted niche in the temple of human achievement. No position as a statue on a shelf will possibly fit him, for he is rather a working model of the entire plan of the building, a replica of the mighty design.

Many of us still share with the ancients that curious dread of the “windy darkness” of the unseen world, that world which we seem sometimes to enter from this side in dreams, in fever-fits, in flickering intuitions. It is the land which Maeterlinck seeks to represent in art, the land which Couperus uses as material for his drama of *Old People and the Things That Pass*. From this twilight consciousness we hurry joyfully back to the common daylight of bodily existence.

It is this bodily life, this daylight scene, as pleasant as country sunlight after a night in a haunted house, that Tolstoi re-creates in art: he lives the life of the body, of muscle, nerve and blood-flow; his scenes take place on no inner stage, but in the noonday of the flesh. We see his camp-fires, bivouacs, ball-rooms, law courts, council chambers, birth- and death-beds, for he is the intellectual centre of an entire solar system. The original impulse of his life is an overmasteringly strong bodily consciousness. It was from this primitive inspiration of the body that both the artist and the Saint had to be evolved.

No man ever had a harder task; but then no other man

in modern times had to run through the gamut of progression from the animal nature to the divine.

Practically in his novels there is but one male character ; that is the average commonplace man, called Pierre or Andrei in *War and Peace*, Levin in *Anna Karenina*, or Nehludof in *Resurrection*. These men only differ from one another in the varying degrees by which they hunger after God. Some are almost dead to Him ; many are quick with desire for the Life-giver, but all alike share so boundingly in physical life that merely to read of them seems actually to quicken heart-beat and blood-flow in the reader. No Frenchman ever wrote of the sensual fire with a power so enkindling as this man that strove with God for a blessing. For force and reality in one mode Tolstoi's women can only be compared with Balzac's. But the genesis of Balzac's creative impulse is mental : he flings forth his conceptions as though they were cast in bronze from the fire of the mind. His figures of wives, prostitutes, young girls and old maids are constructed and fused, while Tolstoi's physical instincts alone make him realise the psychology that accompanies puberty or pregnancy, girlhood or middle age. His Matryona in *The Powers of Darkness* is old womanhood steeped in body's lusts and the grim knowledge they give ; his Anna Karenina an awful gloss on Schopenhauer's doctrine, as the prostitute in *Resurrection* is a living shard from the scrap-heap of the sexual forge. Elsewhere in literature there is nothing like these beings of the flesh. Compared with them Balzac's horrible and sometimes obscene women are not fleshly facts, but illustrative designs merely. In the work of this Russian the blood is like a brimming stream that finds a million irrigation channels, so that every blade and rootlet sucks up the moisture of the parent source. But in the mentality of the Frenchman the blood flows deep in a bed that was excavated centuries ago.

Where Tolstoi's women find their salvation in giving birth, in speeding the passing soul or welcoming the coming one, Tolstoi's men rise out of the body and its lusts to seek God. When Levin is fighting for a philosophy of life, Kitty is preparing for motherhood or soothing the death-bed of Levin's brother. Women are, for Tolstoi, the janitors of the house of life, and therefore Kitty, mere girl as she is, finds herself



at home in a scene of physical horror. It is the peasant view of woman: she is born not to seek God by thought, but to obey His will by merging her whole being in the scheme of generation. In his most exalted moments Tolstoi cannot rise above this view; in his lowest and most unregenerate stage he out-Adams Adam with his outcry against the woman that tempted him. No monk ever railed louder than the creator of the *Kreutzer Sonata*. Woman can only serve God when "she knows that the children, the generations to come, are given to men as their holiest vision, and that she exists to further, with all her being, this sacred task." Her heaven is reached, then, "when the body has accomplished the Law." It is doubtful if she can ever enter any other. All that Tolstoi learnt of wisdom he learnt—or so he says—from the peasant man, but of the peasant woman he makes his wise old man, Mitritch, say: "A peasant woman, what is she? Just mud! There are millions of the likes of you in Russia, and all as blind as moles—knowing nothing! All sorts of spells: how to stop the cattle-plague with a plough, how to cure children by putting them under the perches in the hen-house. . . . So many millions of girls and women, and all like beasts in a forest! As she grows up, so she dies! Never sees anything; never hears anything!" A being so low as this can only escape damnation by being used, as is the outcast in *Resurrection*, for love's purposes where once she served the aims of lust. Living spirit in her own right she is not; she is merely a creature in whom good habits can be induced. She is a being of the flesh: she must obey the law of the flesh. To the day of his death, apparently, Tolstoi could not slough off the old carnal horror, the old carnal joy. And what was bred in the bone produced at times in this fierce Puritan a Rabelaisian and libidinous humour.

But does not this genius of the flesh in Tolstoi express precisely that gulf out of which the race has begun to climb? Is not the cry for escape from it the cry which has resounded century after century as man has learnt the way up?

In the opening of Tolstoi's career as an artist, escaping from the sentimental influence of Dickens and Sterne, he goes straight to life and writes *The Cossacks*. In the Caucasus he has come into contact with a primitive social state where

the pagan joy of life still persists unwithered by the touch of change. The old hunter Yeroshka teaches him that it is not sin to love a girl ; it is salvation. " God made you ; God made the girl, too ; he made everything, father : so it is not a sin to look at a pretty girl." This simple and satisfactory logic explains life. And death is summed up by the saying, " You will die and the grass will grow on your grave, and that is all there is in it." Yeroshka realises that " an animal is far more cunning than a man " ; that a sow is " also a divine creation," and wonders why the Russians " . . . know nothing and are yet so learned." Yeroshka smells of blood and powder, of earth and sweat, but he possesses the lost gift of wholeness, of an undivided nature. Tolstoi as Olenin, at any rate, craves for it, longing for happiness, " whether I be an animal or an insect, or an envelope in which is enclosed a part of the divinity."

It is the " envelope of divinity," so foreign to Yeroshka's philosophy, which betrays him : he cannot go back to the life of these people of the woods and vineyards. It is not in man's power to go back : the gates of Paradise are closed for ever to one who has passed outside it. A mysterious voice tells Olenin that he cannot wholly live this Cossack life, " because he had another idea of happiness which consisted in self-sacrifice." The lost simplicity of the ancient world, that is, its belief that " nothing is a sin," is gone—for those who have outgrown it.

There is no going back.

Tolstoi, in the nerve and fibre of his genius the animal man to whom " Life is God," has begun his strange rehearsal of the race's course and progress.

At the gate of his Cossack Paradise he meets death. And to the genius of the body mortality comes with its deadliest pang. Accordingly it is the primitive horror of the corpse in *War and Peace* that seizes the Princess Marya at the death-bed of her father ; in *Anna Karenina* the fire of the work blazes most fiercely in Nicolai's gasping breath, in his sweat and fear and emaciation. It is only in the shadow of death that those worldlings, the woman, the lover, and the husband, become for a while simple and real. Again the writer, whose first recorded sensation as an infant is that of being bathed, expresses in these words the horror of the flesh and its inevitable dissolution : " The little pond was now washing up against

the embankment, simply because it was full of human bodies—the bare bodies of soldiers floundering about in it, their white skins making vivid contrast to their brick-red arms, faces, and necks. All this mass of bare human flesh was wriggling about with shouts and laughter in that filthy water, like carps flopping in a scoop. This wriggling carried the name of enjoyment, and for that very reason it was particularly melancholy. ‘Flesh, body! *Chair à canon*,’ said Prince Andrei, as he looked down at his bare body and trembled, not so much from chill as from his aversion and horror, incomprehensible even to himself, at the sight of that tremendous mass of bodies rinsing themselves in that filthy pond.” Prince Andrei here foresees death, as the little Princess foresaw life when “she took the Princess’s hand and laid it just below her heart. Her eyes smiled with anticipation, the little downy lip was raised in a happy childlike smile. ‘There! there, do you perceive it? It is so strange. And do you know, Marie, I am going to love him very dearly.’” And it was this happy mother to be who, a few hours later, lay dead with a look on her face that asked: “What have you done to me?” Again, the peasant threatened with a new home is like a creature that is part of the soil. Says he: “And all our peasant ways are here; here from time out of mind. And here’s the threshing floor, and the little garden, and the willows, and here my parents lived, and my grandfather; and my father gave his soul into God’s keeping here—let us stay here, and say our prayers—do not take from us our nest, kind sir.” Nor can a drawing-room hide the persistence of the beast, for do they not talk there after dinner to stimulate the digestion “by moving the muscles of the tongue and gullet”?

So do men weave the fleshly garment of Maya, or illusion, on the loom they have made of space and time.

It is his power over the flesh that makes the greatness of Tolstoi’s art. In the seduction scene of *Resurrection* the crackling of the ice on the river, the whole air of watching earth, comes down like a cloud that shares in the stealthy fire of the lovers. This is joy according to old Yeroshka—the joy of life and death; of damnation and salvation. For in these books everywhere the flesh brings death quick following on life—amid luxury; on the oven of an inn; in the crash of a



tree or to the fool in the hanging of a window-curtain. And in all this there is the joy of the beast and the horror of the worm ; not the awe of the Great White Throne. The savour of mortality is born of the genius of the flesh.

Such was the temper of Tolstoi's youth when he thought there could be no happiness on earth for anyone who had "so large a nose, such thick lips, and such small eyes"; when the coarse, simian face was as yet unmarked by the lines of spiritual conflict or by the graving-tool of divine love. The vices, as he notes, of this temperament are vanity, sensuality and the gambling fever ; its strength is a kinship with the vital processes of nature. In Tolstoi this rises to supreme power when he works with imaginative genius on the material of history. And it is his faculty for sensing the deep subterranean currents of feeling in races which produces the lifelike illusion of *War and Peace*.

We feel that we are not merely watching a spectacle, but actually living in a power-house of energy. When Tolstoi, for instance, desires to explain the movements of humanity in the year 1812 he does it by appealing to our knowledge of those strange impulses which from time to time come down upon men as though they were bees or birds. The gravitation of the Napoleonic armies towards Russia he compares to the strange exodus of the peasants towards "the hot rivers." He says : "Just as birds fly home across the sea, so these men, with their wives and children, made every endeavour to reach that unknown South-East where none of them had ever been before." Thus the whole episode of the invasion of Russia is removed bodily to the realm of instinct, an instinct as dependent on the sense of the flesh as is the passion of the hive. The culmination of this process is found in the portrait of Kutuzov, the General who scorns intellect and knowledge ; who reads a romance of Madame de Genlis on the campaign and whose sole function is to react truly to the mass-emotions of which he is the centre. Kutuzov is nothing, according to Tolstoi, but a great bee-master whose intellect has resolved itself into "the one faculty of calmly holding in check the course of events." In one view he is just a silly old man as he thrusts out his lips like a child to kiss the magic ikon, or smiles inwardly at those German heads among his Generals



that are all full of "arguments which aren't worth a row of pins." But what cares Kutuzov, or his creator, for arguments, since the issue of a battle is determined "not by the plans of the commander-in-chief, but by that imponderable force called the spirit of the army"? Kutuzov led because he knew what was in his soldiers' hearts, as they, too, knew what was in his. Such is the unity of racial instinct as Tolstoi sees it : to him it is an expression of the law of the flesh.

Nor is his scorn of plan-making applied only to the national sentiment of the Russian army. No, the French, too, had to enter Moscow not because of any military scheme, but simply because that "deflowered virgin" of a city was to them only "wine uncorked, which they had to drink." Even Napoleon, when he suffers from influenza, feels that our body is a living machine; let the life in it be left to itself; let it defend itself; it will do more than when you paralyse it by loading it down with remedies. Great man as he was, he seems thus to anticipate the theories of auto-suggestion. Even the brain, the will, and the purpose of this Alexander are but thistledown before the power of instinct. And so we watch this little tool of destiny being brushed in back and chest by one valet, while another scents him with eau-de-Cologne. He is as empty-headed as he looks. And when Moscow's soul is lost by the withdrawal of her people the imagery which Tolstoi uses to describe the state of the doomed city is that of the queenless hive. The bee-master, breaking open some of the waxen cells, "instead of the compact black circles with thousands of bees crouched back to back and contemplating the lofty mysteries of generation, sees hundreds of downcast, half-dead, unconscious skeleton bees, who have died in the holy of holies from which long since the spirit had fled."

Never was history so steeped in the imagery of primitive Nature; never was the arrogant claim of intellect so flouted. In this phantasmagoria of history men are driven by a force within themselves as inexplicable to their intelligence as is the urge of procreation itself. One who "commands" an action is, in this view, no more than the centre of a current.

This spirit, due not so much to fatalism as to Tolstoi's own nature, since this was rooted in the depths of Nature itself, turned him from artist into seer and so made him the

chronicle and brief abstract of humanity's upward course. His life of eighty-two years, what is it but a chart of our history, of our long struggle to evolve—from Yeroshka to the Christ? Like the embryo's short survey of the race's past in physical evolution, so Tolstoi's psychological development follows the course of our inner development. Not only so: he actually lived through a stage which is, as yet, only realised in vision by those who watch from a height the country yet to be explored.

Tolstoi is, then, both history and prophecy.

At any rate, this theory does include in its purview the several facets of this man's many-sided nature: it gives us the great rocklike man, a part of earth herself; the man of appetite; and the man storming the heavens to get a glimpse of God. "Nothing will remain of me but putrescence and worms," says the natural man in him. The natural man in him again enjoys the struggle of a wolf against death. It is another man, yet the same, who wrote that pitiful picture of death in the slaughter-house called *The First Step*, and that awful indictment of man's treatment of life in *Cruel Pleasures*. It is yet another man who in old age can reply to the Holy Synod, who had excommunicated him, thus: "I believe in life eternal. I believe that man is rewarded according to his acts, here and everywhere, now and for ever. I believe all these things so firmly that at my age, on the verge of the tomb, I have often to make an effort not to pray for the death of my body; that is, my birth into a new life."

Tolstoi has run then in his own person the whole course from the animal to the man; he has loved pagan days; has tried the philosophies, from Epicureanism to Stoicism; has explored the religions and extracted the sense of Christianity; has at last found his eternal nature and is at one with the universe of being. He who began as companion of the worm has become pregnant of God. God's servant, Leo Tolstoi, has found the divine rest, but after terrific struggles. It is these struggles that endear him to us.

How was the gulf bridged? The natural man in him so savoured the joy of the Cossacks that he craved the boon of their Paradise; this natural man saw history unroll by means of currents of instinct as inexplicable to reason as the

rage of the hive ; it was this man who painted the dreadful fury of Venus Victrix that spoils and ruins, so that the faces of her rapt victims are red with the fire of hell. The other man, late born in time, like a Hindu stormed the heights and plumbed the depths in search of God, and, like a man of the West, sought, too, for a way of life that would bring peace and happiness on earth. How was the gulf bridged ?

Tolstoi's own account of the matter is that he learnt all from the two peasants, Sutaief and Bonaref, and from the laws for man and woman which these expounded. The laws are two : for the man, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," and for the woman, "in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children." For the happiness of men consists in life. And life is labour. The millions who obey these commands are in the right way, for they fear neither death nor pain nor privation. They also find God in the only way in which He can be found—by obeying His orders.

It is perfectly true, to an extent that is very difficult for Westerners to realise, that what we find in Tolstoi's teaching he first found in the Russian peasant. He found sects that refused military service, that refused oaths, that obeyed Christ's economic system literally in that they owned no private property ; he found his principle of the "great crime," the owning of land by private owners, among the peasants. Tolstoi was, in fact, steeped in the life of Nature as the moujik lives it. The beauty of loving-kindness he learnt, slowly and like a child, from the traditions, from the *bylines*, or peasant fables. From the cradle to the grave he was lapped in Russian earth, in the spirit, half rank, yet clean, half fantastic, yet simple, of the Slav who is Tatar, too, in his art and his morality.

The spirit of the earth that cradled him was answered by the nervous system which made him sense life always through the body. One part of Tolstoi would be well understood by a Primitive Methodist in a Cornish chapel : that is his hunger for God, his longing to escape that sense of orphanhood which he feels when without God. The Primitive Methodist, too, smacks often of that carnality which finds in woman a vessel of damnation and of lure. But what the Cornishman would not understand in Tolstoi is the appalling directness of the man's logic, his devouring honesty in applying what he has



learnt. And this is Russian. Yet even the Russian stands aghast at a thoroughness so absolute. For in Tolstoi it is accompanied by rage and bitterness, by an acrid, scorching smoke of contempt for his own weakness as well as for the cruelty, injustice, and moral folly of the possessing classes. And this bitterness continued to the end. One of the saddest literary testaments in the world is that fragmentary play, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, in which he paints the misery of his position when he is forced to live the life of the world, yet finds that life unspeakably abominable.

The truth is that Tolstoi's own position was one of unavoidable duplicity. The one prayer he prayed, "Make for me a straight path, O Lord," could never be answered because of his own nature. He was unable to feel God actually at work except in a social state that was based on honesty. Like a man who cannot work in an untidy house, Tolstoi had to put the house in order before he could be at peace. And there, of course, he was utterly baulked, for the will of men is set *not* to tidy the house and *not* to serve God. And against this rock of ill-will Tolstoi broke heart and head in vain.

He presents in this matter a complete contrast to Dostoevsky, who was satisfied with an imperfect world because, even in such a world, he found God in men's souls. And the creator of Alyosha had no need of a new world, because the old one had not failed to produce the divine treasure. The oyster may be poor, but what matter that, so the pearl be good? No such comfort visited the crucified soul of Tolstoi, who is fain to call down the fire upon men. There is something of the fierceness of a priest of Baal about him: he hacks himself. This he must once have suspected, for does he not deny "any predilection for Christianity"? It is the good sense, not the character, of Christ that appeals to him. He reviles the Church, not because it fails in tenderness, but because it disobeys Christ's commandments and condones war, capital punishment, and the "great crime" of private property, consoling the poor for the injustice done to them in this world only by a title-deed of heavenly property.

Of the two possible roads which lead upwards from the animal, Tolstoi needs must choose the road of the spirit, where the vehicle is love and the guide is mysticism. And



so he sets out on the great journey in search of the "universal spirit." But with him, as with others, the God whom he finds is the God whom in seeking he makes to be, as Giovanni Gentile puts it. Tolstoi's God is He of the two commandments; of the laws of the flesh, one for man and one for woman. He is a God of humble work, and His best attribute is that, a peasant creation, He feeds the hungry and clothes the naked. His followers are as poor and simple as the Nazarene. This road followed by Tolstoi and the mystics ends in union. It is Miguel de Unamuno who puts the desire of Tolstoi, the God-seeker: "I want to be myself, and yet, without ceasing to be myself, to be others as well, to merge myself into the totality of things, visible and invisible, to extend myself into the illimitable of space, and to prolong myself into the infinity of time." In words that are like hammer-strokes the Spaniard puts what was Tolstoi's bridge: Tolstoi, too, was sure that "He is in us by virtue of the hunger, the longing which we have for Him, and He is Himself creating the longing for Himself." But Dostoevsky's knowledge is even more direct, for some men in the flesh are already "everybody else"; they are whole even according to the Spanish mystic's dream.

But there is another bridge, another road upwards, the road of the mind, where thought is the vehicle and the guide the thinker, the scientist. The goal here is full comprehension of the universe, visible and invisible. On this road one frames hypotheses and tests them by experience. It was of this road that Tchegov spoke when he said: "Modern culture is only the first beginning of work for a great future, work which will perhaps go on for tens of thousands of years, in order that man may, if only in the remote future, come to know the truth of the real God—that is not, I conjecture, by seeking in Dostoevsky, but by clear knowledge, as one knows twice two are four."

It is not the "direct knowledge" of the mystic, this twice two are four, but it is "direct knowledge" in another mode. And therefore these two roads that move upwards and parallel to one another would seem to meet. But at infinity.

Tolstoi will have none of this way of the mind: he takes the peasant's view of art and science. We know what he makes of the planner, the schemer, in history. And his

priests of science merely exist, like the other priests, to cheat the millions of workers out of what is their own. To Tolstoi even scientific cleanliness is an affectation of the dishonest rich, and antiseptics are just as silly as eau-de-Cologne. And as for the effort of mental science to find from the nature of man's powers what link there may be between finite and infinite, we know what Tolstoi makes of such an effort by his play, *The Fruits of Culture*, a crude and bitter travesty of the work of psychical research.

This road of the mind would never have brought Tolstoi into contact with the great mass of simple people to whom he makes appeal: it is not his way at all. He is by nature not a thinker or reasoner, not a loving man, not a holy man. His gift is that bodily merging in the great sea of life which he shares with the animal and the insect, and especially with the man whose intelligence is closed to the wisdom of this world. The genesis of his whole spiritual life is to be found in the scene where the Tolstoi children watch the fool Grischa at prayer. "The moon, which was almost full, shone in through the window looking towards the forest. The long white figure of the fool was illuminated on one side by the pale, silvery rays of the moon; on the other it was in deep shadow.

"O great Christian Grischa! Thy faith was so strong that thou didst feel the nearness of God; thy love was so great that thy words poured from thy lips of themselves—thou didst not revise them with thy judgment. And what lofty praise didst thou offer to His Majesty, when, finding no words, thou didst fling thyself to the earth in tears."

Is not this the Way of the Cross as it has been trodden by millions of simple men? Does not this scene disclose the secret thrill of the long-forgotten ages of instinctive groping up which the human soul has found a way?

Humbly, like a child, a fool, Tolstoi of the mighty will, of the instinct for the exaltation of the Cross, has to learn the alphabet of love from the despised and rejected, from the idiot, from the moujik. This giant that sets himself to school is, magnified a thousand times, the common man who is of the earth, earthly, yet desires to be of the Lord from heaven.

The Tolstoyan story is a mirror in whose depths humanity

may read much of its own obscure history, something possibly of its yet darker future.

For the form of civilisation to which a mystic must look—if he concerns himself with civilisations at all—is one where man builds a good State because he cannot serve God in a bad one. Spiritual conversion, man by man, is the process by which the world, according to this scheme, must be rebuilt. In this scheme the deliberate calculation of ends, the architectonics of social reform, are useless. For the basis of all action is primordial; it comes from the source of life, a source which does not act through man's mentality, but by vision, as in the ecstasy of a St. John of the Cross, or in a flash of insight, as when Tolstoi sees, when the head of the murderer falls into the basket of the guillotine, that a crime against the law of God has been committed. This intuitive, direct insight comes, as Tolstoi sees it, from God. The method by which it comes he calls "reason." But by reason he by no means implies the mere mental process of arguing from certain premises to certain conclusions. For his "reason" is "a law analogous to those which regulate the nutrition and the reproduction of the animal, the growth and the blossoming of herb and tree, the movement of the earth and the planets. . . . Reason cannot be defined, and we have no need to define it, for not only do we all know it, but we know nothing else."

Now, what "reason" is this that keeps the most ancient heavens in place and guides the life of all?

It is the one supernatural power which Tolstoi acknowledges, that intuitive and direct intelligence which sways all life, but which in the case of man has to be rediscovered by his own efforts. So understood, the "Fall" of man is simply that sophistication which has blinded him to the truth that happier and simpler creatures have never lost. When "reason" is again mastered by man, he will then realise, not by the mind, but with all his nature, the unity of existence. Thus we come to the point when, as Tolstoi says, "Humanity has done with the idea of life considered as individual existence." Signor de Unamuno's vision of desire will be ours, for, in Tolstoi's image, "I see the light as an enormous temple in which the light falls from on high and precisely in the middle. To become united we must all go towards the light. Then all



of us, come together from all directions, will find ourselves in the company of men we did not look for ; in that is the joy."

Tolstoi's thought, by expressing in concrete form the Eastern ideal of life, challenges, of course, the whole tendency of Western life. The object of the West has been by division of labour to raise ever higher and higher the tide of production. This aim is at this moment taking on a more definite form than ever before, for it is bent on nothing less than the organisation of the current of inflowing life for its own purposes and by its own scientific methods. It will re-create existence and build the social scheme on a deliberate, though slowly evolving, plan, through birth-control, through international organisation, and, finally, by the deliberate classification of men according to mental calibre, so that each human being shall be set to perform the exact work for which his intelligence fits him. The aim is a commonwealth of divided labour, a commonwealth as accurately defined as that of the bee, but by mind, not instinct.

All this is diametrically opposed to Tolstoi's principle, for his aim is, not manipulation, but a yielding of the soul to the divine current as perceived through instinct, intuition, and faith. The question with him is not to make as many pins as possible, nor even as many men, but to make godlike such men as God may choose to create. Such men will, one and all, realise that life is labour. We have lost health by dividing labour, as we have violated justice by freeing some men from labour. No man can be healthy unless he toils with muscle, the sweating toil of the heavy earth ; unless in craftsman's work he uses his fingers, unless by thinking, his brain ; and by communal intercourse, the instinct that bids him draw near his fellows. Against this fourfold activity—muscular, tactile, mental, social—without which no man can be healthy or happy, the West has set a division of labour which is none the less a crime because it has produced Western science, industry, and art. In producing these things it has defied God and destroyed man.

There is no true Western science, therefore, because the only true science is that which sets out to ascertain what is the true destiny of man. "Such was the science of Confucius, Buddha, Moses, Socrates, Christ, Mahomet."



To a man of this temper there is naturally no science in the mere inquiry into the laws of Nature, for these will not reveal the purpose of creation. Tchekov's knowledge of God, found by investigation after ten thousand years, is not for this Titan weary of the flesh. One must escape the flesh and so find the moral law.

And the essence of this moral law, the essence that makes it God's law, is simple enough; is simple enough, in fact, to torpedo the whole Western system of morality. It is just "give more than you get"—always. But Western morality says that the only principle by which human nature can be got to move is—"get, whenever possible, more than you give." Tolstoi's achievement is to have brought all the teaching of the Eastern prophets and Saints into one formula, the most revolutionary that was ever devised.

But, "if the laws of Solon, of Confucius, are science, if the teaching of Moses, of Christ, are science," then "the temples in Athens, the Psalms of David, church worship, are art," for such art, being iconography, shows the steps by which men approach the sense of unity that is the final consummation of existence. Is it any wonder that with such an aim as this no artist can be allowed to stray upon the heights of Olympus, that no artist can be suffered to become fat? Must they not, each one, suffer with man in order to find salvation?

But when, as we Europeans think, the artist is at his greatest, Tolstoi condemns him; he found in the creator of Hamlet "no artist"; he passed sentence on Beethoven; he called Chopin "Animal."

This view of art is the logical result of Tolstoi's science. The scientist, whom Tolstoi hated, works by experimental analysis to discover the laws of matter. But it is just this physical world that Tolstoi fears—because it speaks in him with such tremendous force. Yet it is through those senses which Tolstoi feared that the artist creates his copy of the world of matter, exploring by word, sound, colour and form the emotional powers of the sea of being. Wrought upon by such powers, spiritual but diabolic, Tolstoi resists, for he feels that these creatures of God, light, sound and form, are but veils that hide from him the very God Himself. Being of the mind of St. Augustine, that God has created us for Himself

alone, Tolstoi deems it a crime to forget the glory of the Eternal even in the contemplation of His most majestic ministers.

For the man who began by thinking that one can only live when one is drunken with life lived to write these words to himself: "There are men with powerful wings whom pleasure leads to alight in the midst of the crowd, where their pinions are broken. Such . . . am I. Then they beat their broken wings; they launch themselves desperately, but fall anew. The wings will mend. I shall fly high."

He trailed broken wings, but he flew high. This is Tolstoi, but it is also Man himself.

### CHAPTER III

### TURGENEV

It is difficult to realise that Thackeray and Turgenev were contemporaries, although there was in the cosmopolitan habits of both men a certain kinship, as well as a similarity in their origins, since the county flavour of the Thackeray family can be set over against the boyar ancestry of the Russian. In temper and outlook, however, the gulf between the two giants is deep, for in Thackeray it was the city that fed his genius and in Turgenev the steppe. One cared pre-eminently for manners and seems now to belong to a bygone age, while the other cared only for the essential quality of character, and that persists. Turgenev is consequently one of ourselves but Thackeray's people make us smile at their mannerisms ; they are quaint.

Great genius, like nonentity, escapes the attempt to realise it, for the greatest artists are so catholic in their appeal that their own personalities remain hidden, or can only be detected, as we detect the working of a natural force, by the effects produced. Shakespeare and Turgenev are alike in this respect, or would be if Turgenev had not left us the *Sportsman's Sketches*. These naïve and delicate offshoots of his early power reveal more of himself than do any of his finished masterpieces ; without them Ivan Turgenev would be almost as elusive as William Shakespeare. But the unnamed Sportsman of the *Sketches* is a personality, though he is busy, not with himself, but with the boyars and their agents, with the peasants, serfs, and huntsmen of the scattered villages and lonely manor-houses of the steppes. First and foremost, it is clear that Turgenev is equally at home with peasant as with boyar : that not only is the secret of every heart open to his observation, but that every tongue wags freely with him. Wherever

he goes, Turgenev is at home with the company ; among the people in the wayside inn, when Yakov the Turk sang, it was Turgenev who voiced what all were feeling, that in his notes there was " something dear and akin to us, something of breadth and space, as though the familiar steppes were unfolding before our eyes and stretching away to endless distance." Yakov's song, with its effect of endless distance, is typical, in fact, of Turgenev's own magic, for his tales, too, are filled with the suggestion of great space. It is, again, to Turgenev himself that the man in the nightcap talks all night, retailing to him humiliations that must have been painful even in thought. It is Turgenev who shrinks from the fat, self-indulgent boyar when the footman is flogged for forgetting to cool the wine. It was Turgenev who wrote *Biryuk, the Wolf*, a tale of man's pity for man that epitomises his vast power of feeling with all that lives. This is more than pity, more than sympathy or indignation ; it is a merging of the personality of the artist in the being of the character that suffers and agonises. Turgenev, whatever else he may be, is one who realises the consciousness of another with a personal and poignant clearness. Such a man could not be cold or cruel : nor, as an artist, could he mock at pain or stupidity. In quite simple language, an extraordinarily good man, this Turgenev.

One always feels in watching a judge sentencing a fellow-man to punishment that there is something ugly in the sight, as though a frail and imperfect creature were impudently assuming the omniscience of a god. One says : The man cannot honestly do it, for how can he know the secrets of all hearts ? But of all the men who have shown themselves in their work, it is Turgenev whom one could best trust in the judge's seat, and that, perhaps, because one guesses that his sentence would be— " Go and sin no more." One can almost hear him say it, even to the man who enjoyed " embroidered coats, wigs, canes, perfumes, eau-de-Cologne of the best sort, snuff-boxes, large pictures," and yet demanded the last farthing of debt from a starving peasant. This boyar, whose face looks " as if it were padded " with fat, lives beside the outcast whose existence nobody realised even enough to enrol him in the census.

But it is not only in the world of human values that Turgenev is the herald of modern literary art, since his power



of "other-consciousness" is accompanied by a feeling for environment that is, in some respects, like Conrad's. In *Heart of Darkness*, as in *Youth*, it is not merely man, nor man's heart, that lives: it is man's heart come to life out of the forest and out of the dazzle of tropic sunlight. Forest and sea have "come alive" at one point, in the human being. That human being is no longer a separate figure that moves against a painted screen, but something stepping into the foreground where all is alert. Between to-day and yesterday in creative art that is the difference: in Victorian work the background is but painted canvas; in modern work it is interpenetrated with the sense of life. In Turgenev the new spirit can be found: in the tale of the *Sportsman's Sketches* called *Byezhin Prairie*, where the boys lie round the fire at night on the steppe and talk of magic, the Russian country comes suddenly to life in a sound; when Lavretsky in *The House of Gentlefolk* goes to live in his ancestral manor-house, the lush growths in the neglected garden, the weeds and hemlocks, take a hand in his spiritual drama, they are a part of the urge of life that carries him towards Lisa. Nature and man's heart are here seen as one: it is no longer a case of background and foreground.

For Turgenev the barriers were down, the lines that separate man from man in social condition, as well as the higher wall of separation that seems built between Nature and humanity. It is this characteristic that gives to Turgenev's work an effect so modern and separates him more especially from Thackeray, in whom class distinctions and the differing atmospheres created by them form the central inspiration of all his work. Thackeray's novels, like Hogarth's pictures, are so many modish studies, and man is his subject, but not man as God made him. That house at Clapham, The Hermitage, where the foundations of the Newcome wealth were laid, where "the lodge-keeper was serious, and a clerk at a neighbouring chapel," where "the head gardener was a Scotch Calvinist—only occupying himself with the melons and pines provisionally, and until the end of the world," is a type of the whole series of Thackeray's social studies. Piety and Possession, the twin gods of the Victorian heaven, are here, but cut and trimmed to the City fashion in these things, as

fashions were in the period when Napoleon was meeting with his Russian reverses.

It is the men of this time, as he discovers them in Russia, that Turgenev uses as material wherewith to create ideal types that are as true in our day as they were in his. He is concerned, not with fashions, but with essential man, with every kind of man, not excluding the fanatic, though that type was most alien to himself. Since to extract the essential essence of the man is his business, a serf is to Turgenev as important as a nobleman, a peasant as a scientist. Deeper than all the modes imposed from without Turgenev's genius reaches. It is this fact that makes his work so heartening, so encouraging especially at the present time when we cannot but be dismayed at the appalling revelations of human meanness that are being made on every side. For, on the whole, what Turgenev finds in humanity is good, marvellously good in quality considering that this man is no sentimentalist but, rather, a pessimist, whose instinct it is to seek truth at any cost. Yet in almost all his characters, even in the most sinister, he finds a little sediment of gold: some mental force in evil, some spiritual cleanness in simplicity. And since Turgenev, with his penetration, finds this good in us, it is not for lesser men to despair.

This does not prevent him, however, from feeling the pessimism of destiny. His strong man, Bazarov, is swept away by a poisoned germ as carelessly as though he were but the village idiot; his Lisa, the spirit of purity, is lost to the world that sadly needed her light; his Lemm, the idealist of art, finds once only the inspiration he hungers for. These fail, not by their own weakness, but by a Nemesis they cannot escape, a Nemesis that, as Turgenev saw history, works blindly keeping all human beings dancing at the end of a wire. The tides of chance flow against man—that is Turgenev's verdict. Whatever god there be, he certainly cares nothing for individuals, and yet, speaking over Bazarov's grave, Turgenev can write these lines: "However passionate, sinning, and rebellious the heart hidden in the tomb, the flowers growing over it peep serenely at us with their innocent eyes; they tell us not of eternal peace alone, of that great peace of indifferent Nature; they tell us, too, of eternal reconciliation and of life without end." In the greatness of the sweeping tides alone is there

a promise. Yet it is just these sweeping tides that carry away the individual, stifling his weak cry with utter carelessness.

But human beauty, force, simplicity, spirituality and loving-kindness persist. To Bazarov's humble parents there is left nothing but a grave, yet on the road to it they comfort one another with mutual kindness. Something persists in human nature after every catastrophe, something essentially human and unconquerable.

It is this invincible soul in man that Turgenev lays bare, and that with a simplicity which marks him as intensely modern. For the effort of modern art is to strip, not clothe, to pierce to the heart of the thing depicted, and leave that bare beating heart as the true symbol of greatness. It is the power to do this that makes Turgenev the master spirit of modern literature. Even Shakespeare, of whom it is usual to say that he ennobled our race by the pictures he drew of it, does not always work with truth-telling simplicity. Much of the greatness of his characters is derived from the mere splendour of the expression given them. Does not the sounding eloquence of Henry the Fifth hide the historic figure of a ruthless conqueror, and do not countless readers believe that the Hamlet of exquisite irresolution is a great thinker because of his phrases? Rudin, the Russian Hamlet, who tried to make a river navigable and starved himself to do it, yet without success, lives, too, on phrases, but his creator avoids reproducing them, giving us instead the things that are not phrases—wrinkles, grey hair and tattered elbows—and a tired soul still persisting as a homeless wanderer in the quest of the ideal. There is no glamour in this Rudin, in whom we recognise some of our own best qualities, if we are humble men. With glamour Turgenev will have nothing to do: truth is his sole master.

The spectacle of the world to-day is a curious one, for probably there has never before been such a thin wall between the old view of government by brute force and the new one of government by good will. We feel, all of us who are sensitive, that a slight shift in the wind of instinct on the part of those governing would bring in the era of good will. There is on all sides an urge of desire towards something better than the horrible welter of want, coercion and hatred in which



we find ourselves engulfed. Yet the wall, thin as it is, between this state of misery and madness and a state of happiness and good sense, persists. It persists mainly because our rulers remain blankly ignorant of the psychology of the emergent type of to-day.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century a new temper has been at work creating in the dispossessed—that is, in the bulk of the human race—a fresh reaction towards existence. This changed mentality is direct and authoritative, built up on a body of rationalised thought by the few, the *intelligentsia* of every nation. But these few insensibly mould the thinking of the mass of the discontented. This changed attitude to life, the shaping genius of the next stage of history, can now be defined as discontent become scientific.

Science has taken up the slogan of the French Revolution—Liberty, Equality and Fraternity—and defined its ideal. It has proved that the laws of Nature do not, as was once supposed, lead inevitably to disease, crime, want and a poor standard of life. On the contrary, it affirms that physical life might be, here and now, freed from most of the ills that beset it as a result of poverty, ignorance and ill-will.

The temper of the scientific view of life has created a psychology different in many ways from the blind, unreasoning acquiescence of earlier times. This is the great root fact in the position of the world to-day; but because it is a fact only just emerging into action and remaining in essence still on the spiritual plane, it goes unrecognised or denied.

Now the importance of Turgenev is that he, working, no doubt, unconsciously as an artist, incarnated the new spirit in a figure of amazing vitality and power. That is, of course, in Bazarov in *Fathers and Children*. If we understand Bazarov we shall understand the temper that is moving below the surface of the present discontent. And this though Bazarov was given to the world as long ago as 1857.

Every age has been the expression of a formative idea; it is not until we understand the idea of an epoch that we can even begin to read what it stands for. Bazarov tells us that the new mentality of which he is the type sees everything in terms of utility. This means that the spirit of man is calling for a complete set of new values which will overturn



almost all the notions in morality, in religion, and in art that have ruled the world for so long. Those who are under the sway of these new values believe that life here on this planet might be made within a short time a happy state for most men to start with, and ultimately perhaps for all men. They believe that there are three means by which this consummation can be brought about—first, by the setting up of a system of wealth production for the enrichment of all, not for the benefit of the few who thereby are enabled to enslave the rest ; second, by the utilisation of the full powers of nature, not for mutual destruction, but for mutual blessing ; and third, by the control of the origins of the race by a system of birth-control based on knowledge and freed from prejudice, which will ultimately eliminate the imbecile, the criminal and the lunatic. In this ideal the goal is the perfecting of life here and now : it presupposes, not rulers merely who will enforce laws, but a people who shall, individually and collectively, set themselves to the common aim. In this respect of communal responsibility the new ideal differs widely from the Victorian conception of the divine event.

This ideal is a glorious dream, and no more, at the moment, but inasmuch as the foundations of it are laid on knowledge, there is a possibility that it may not always remain a mere dream. For in small ways we have already proved that to obey Nature, neither to outrage her, nor to fight her, is to win amazing victories.

So far so good. But what is not yet realised is that to bring everything to the test of utility, to ask how it serves well-being here and now, is to banish to the lumber-room a thousand ideals that have always ruled the mind of civilised man, that he still, in fact, regards affectionately as the spurs which have forced him along the upward path.

These ideals take, mainly, three forms : they are racial, religious or sexual ; that is, they dominate man from the cradle to the grave. In race there is the group of ideas associated with the idea " the honour of a nation." It is always this ideal, set up as a fetish, that is used at the opening of a war to lash the peoples into fever, though those who wield the lash know full well that honour is not even remotely concerned with the causes of modern war. But without the concept

"honour," it would have been impossible to conceal the hideous nakedness of fact.

In religion the case is even stranger, for here the whole fabric of delusion dealing with expiatory sacrifice, with purgatories and penances, with trinities and unities and systems of atonement, has simply been built up in order to hide the foundations which Christ Himself laid down ; that is, the communal sharing of the means of life as symbolised in the Lord's Supper.

In questions of sex the perversion of primitive taboos has led to results that are even more disastrous than the camouflage called national honour, or the organised hypocrisy of false Christianity. For the nations are only occasionally called upon to consider their honour, and men may, and do, constantly rise above their systems of theology, but false sexual traditions are incessantly poisoning the springs of life itself. Sex serves two purposes : the re-creation of the race by the child, as well as the health and joy of the adult human being. Nor are these two objects incompatible—to anything but purblind folly. But the sexual traditions of to-day serve neither of these two purposes. For, as is shown by the treatment meted out to the illegitimate child, it is not the well-being of the race that our sexual taboos set out to forward. Still less is it the aim of health and joy, for the prostitute and the woman condemned to celibacy are evidences to the contrary. No, sex, like nationalism, like religion, is to-day ruled by a set of ideals so de-rationalised that it is difficult to anyone but the anthropologist to realise how they came into existence at all. Yet so powerful are these traditions that even at this moment such a moderate and rational demand as that which asks that the man and woman who cannot live together happily should be allowed to separate with dignity is greeted with horror by thousands of good people who, plainly, have never yet asked themselves what end sex was obviously meant by Nature to serve.

For a Bazarov these prejudices do not exist. Neither do they exist for the mentality of to-day that is bent on getting down to the essentials of life. To the casting off of sentimentalism the race is, in fact, being driven by the destruction that is coming on it as a result of its orgy of crooked thinking. For as a race the white man is threatened with the fate of

universal suicide if he persists in pursuing his national honour ; in religion, unless we learn to love our neighbour by sharing with him, nothing will, in the end, be produced that can be distributed ; and sexually, as though the other two forces were not enough, as a result of joyless, enforced union, of commercialised pleasure in place of joy, of enforced celibacy for conventional reasons, the white race is already the mere shadow of what it might be in health and power and beauty.

If we would be whole, we must free ourselves from superstition. We must look fearlessly on everything and ask *Cui bono* ? Bazarov's extraordinary position is given him by the fact that this is exactly what he does—and did, as early as 1857.

There is in *Fathers and Children* a dialogue where this is put down in so many words. Here speaks Paul Petrovitch, who is of the aristocratic type that has so often tossed the world into war, but which lost its first tooth, so to say, when the duel fell out of fashion. Says Paul to Bazarov :

“ Is it indeed true that you recognise no authority ? ”

“ Why should I ? ” asks Bazarov, “ and what ought I to recognise ? You show me a reasonable thing ; I admit it, and that is all.”

This is indeed all, but the trouble with the world to-day is merely the accumulated result of disregarding the reasonable thing.

Again says Bazarov : “ A good chemist is twenty times more useful than the best poet.”

“ You then believe in science only ? ”

“ I have already had the honour of telling you that I believe in nothing. What do you mean by the word ‘ science,’ taken in a general sense ? There are sciences, as there are trades and professions ; there is no science in the meaning you give the word.”

That is, abstract knowledge, knowledge that does not serve an end, is unrecognised. And even human problems have no interest for this blatant zoologist who prefers the life-story of *Dytiscus marginatus* to the history of Paul Petrovitch. Yet while he laughs at the embarrassment of Fenitchka as she brings in the chocolate, he lays down the new law of sex when he observes : “ Why should she be embarrassed ? She



is a mother, then she is right." There is no more to be said. And so, by the simplest phrase, Turgenev pierces to the heart of the new thought.

But, by the peasant sense, this Bazarov is no better than a buffoon, for, although the young doctor flatters himself that he knows how to talk to peasants, it is of him that one of the moujiks says: "He talked with me because his tongue itched. The masters are all the same: do they understand anything?" Below the appeal to utility in the thinker there is always a deeper depth of sense to be plumbed: it is that of the mere handworker, who has no theories at all, either of sense or nonsense. This, too, is shown by Turgenev.

It is Bazarov who sums up the new view of existence. Says he: "Nature is not a temple, but a workshop, and man is a workman there." So far it is the temple ideal that has kept man's head in the clouds and his feet stumbling in the mire, a true Johnny-Head-in-Air. With the passing of the temple idea will pass some good things, but many bad ones, reverence among them. Accordingly Bazarov finds it absurd that a middle-aged man should play on the violoncello and has no scruple in saying that he finds it absurd. Of the beauty, Madame Odintsof, he remarks that her body would be fine on a dissecting table. Yet, after all, it is her will, not his, that drives them apart, although Bazarov saves his dignity by declaring loudly that "it is better to break stones on the highway than to let a woman get power over you, were it only with the end of her little finger." The whole romanticism of modern love, with its pedestal for the woman, he dismisses with the phrase "a man ought to be fierce." He declares that the peasant who beats his wife chooses the better part.

In Bazarov we have the incarnation of the spirit of the new world that is now finding expression in a multitude of ways, in scientific socialism, in a communistic reading of the New Testament, and finally in a general refusal to be satisfied with anything short of a full and free life, a refusal that makes short work of traditions wherever these place themselves in the path of advance. In this creation of Turgenev's we have a man definitely seated in the mean, a man set upon one matter, the satisfactory handling of this everyday life of ours, as in a workshop, not in a temple. All other worlds of endeavour



are to him mere moonshine, or, to use his favourite word, romanticism.

But if in the character of Bazarov we have a portrait of the utilitarian type, it is Turgenev also who gives us an analysis of the three other elements that are at work in society. These elements are the women, the workers, and the dreamers. For a form of social life, like a human being, is not fully developed without body, heart and brain. And in this matter of the new world, if the temper of it is the temper of Bazarov, it is to Turgenev's Lisa and Elena that we must turn for the passive and active beauty of the heart's idealism, and to Dmitri Rudin for some comprehension of the difficulty man finds in bringing the mental plane into touch with the physical, active plane, and finally, to Turgenev's peasants for some idea of the quality of the raw material from which is to be evolved the factory hand and the landworker of to-morrow. And if it seems strange that we should turn to a writer of novels for any of these things, that fact is only a proof of the water-tight compartments in which we all live mentally. For because Turgenev belongs to literature and not to politics, his masterly instinct for character that gave him insight into the future is neglected by the political thinker who might learn almost everything from him. This is a misfortune, for of the three types of character it is incumbent on us to understand, the scientists, the idealists, and the primitive workers, it is Turgenev who has the clearest vision. Beneath the clothes he sees the man ; inside the body, he sees the heart and brain. This power of insight it is that makes it possible for him to paint individualised portraits that express the psychology of a whole set of people of similar make.

We can all realise the way in which birds of similar religious or political feather flock together, obeying an instinct as natural as that of a homing pigeon. But to express the essential elements of a group in the form of one character is beyond the power of any but the greatest artists. It is here that Turgenev rules as master : his people are ideal types, yet lose nothing of their individuality. His Bazarov is a rough-tongued medical student who dies because a country doctor has no means of sterilising his instruments : that is one side of Bazarov. But the other is—modern Europe in its temper

of appeal to utility, in its refusal to consider anything whatever in the terms of romance. Understand Bazarov and you will understand the character of the emergent type of to-day.

But there is for the creative artist an even greater task : it is to draw in the ideal world a being who shall express some power, some spiritual quality that in actual life can only be caught in flying glimpses. Such figures are Lisa in *A House of Gentlefolk* and Elena in *On the Eve*. Both are young girls and belong, therefore, to the class that has generally proved most baffling to the artist, for every line in portraiture here must be as delicate as the contours of a child's face. In Turgenev's Lisa it is the simplicity of a child's faith that we are shown, combined with the iron will that goes with fanaticism. For the sake of her ideal of right Lisa refuses happiness in a manner so completely childlike that we all know she has no choice but to leave her little white room with its pot-plants and sunshine for the dead monotony of the years in a nunnery. It is the simplicity of childlike will that makes of Lisa a figure unique yet typical of a whole class of human souls. Elena in *On the Eve* is utterly different : she dwells not apart in the absolute purity of a goodness whose mere existence is enough, for she is the spirit of active help that makes things better for all, from kittens up to political reformers. But Elena and Lisa together give a vision of what woman has to bring to the new world. For man, whose business it is "to be fierce," would, left alone, turn all our temples into model dwelling-houses with first-class sanitation. Too much Bazarov withers the heart.

Yet even here, even though Lisa belongs to a type that is eternal, it is significant that Turgenev makes her credible by planting her deep in the soil of old tradition. Though she is educated, in the sense that she can play the piano and speak French, all the inspiration of her life has been derived from a peasant nurse. Her judgments are those of a pious peasant woman. Elena, on the other hand, has learnt, not from a peasant woman, but from the young students, and to their thinking she brings will. It is Elena whose strength survives the death of her patriot lover and who disappears into the unknown to work for the dawn. New Europe will not be built without that strange figure of Red Rosa.

These great women of Turgenev's pages are extraordinarily peaceful, almost as peaceful, though not as stupid, as the archaic Greek faces. Though they suffer, they are not restless; pregnant, not with child, but with destiny, they enjoy the patience of the child-carrying woman. Their will is as unswerving as that of destiny itself, but not as capricious. There is about them an elemental feeling as though they were in fact close to the secret heart of that unfolding life whose servants they are. Strangely enough, it is not in Turgenev's good women only that this kinship with the will of life makes itself felt. It is evident also in that portrait of the vampire-woman in *Torrents of Spring*. This sinister being, with her wide nostrils and bonhomie, is a peasant, too, with all the peasant rankness about her. Yet, although she debauches youth, you cannot call her fleshly. In the end she turns on the spectator the face of a hawk. Here again, as in Elena, is a curve of destiny cut by the will that uses appetite but as its tool. In this human bird of prey there is no suggestion of the human being so merged in the flesh that the woman is no more than a beautiful animal. For that one must turn to Anna Karenina, who has reached the position where the monks placed all women: she is a fair iniquity, a devil's bait. Like Vronsky's horse, she is a thing used, as Turgenev's women never are. Only one woman in Tolstoi could be placed near Lisa and Elena, and that is the outcast in *Resurrection*. Yet the difference between this prostitute and those virginal figures of Turgenev is the contrast between the man on a cross and the same man alive and at work. I, "if I be lifted up," will save and heal: this may be said of the tortured woman whom all men's passions have defiled, but Lisa and Elena are active principles, stirring the souls and brains of men. Compare in this respect the seduction scene in *Resurrection*, where the flesh speaks, with the garden scene between Lisa and her lover: here are two worlds, both of passion—one the passion of the body, the other of the soul. In one is woman, the thing used, in the other, woman the inspiration of man's soul, a transmutation of the primitive hunger, unacknowledged by the Bazarov temper yet existing in spite of it. For the will of woman, whether it is blind, insensate and of the flesh, or full of vision and of the spirit, is



the strongest thing in the world. Tolstoi knew this, and hated it. Turgenev acknowledged the fact joyfully.

To grasp the mentality of the peasant is important, because the countryman is, after all, the raw material from which city life creates the town artisan. It is, besides, on the temper of the peasant that the future stability of civilisation depends, for if the peasant refuses to feed the cities, that means the ultimate disintegration of society.

Turgenev's peasant studies present the most complete picture we possess of the Russian countryman in particular and of the whole type countryman in general. There are, of course, in his sketches traits that are specifically Russian, traits of imagination, of something like insanity as seen in very primitive peoples, but there are also characteristics that anyone who knows French or English country people would recognise at once as "country," as distinct from "town." It is, for instance, significant that the first study in the *Sportsman's Sketches* is "Hor and Kalinitch," for here are set down the two types of countrymen who are found everywhere, the calculating one of whom it is said "the Russian peasant would skin God," and the dreamer who is full of kindly, generous feeling, even for "the master," and who is content if he can keep body and soul together as long as he can share the life of the wild creatures whose shy friendliness is very like his own. Both types are found in England, though Hor, the prudent, is the commoner. He becomes in Russia a tenant farmer; in England he leads his branch of the Workers' Union. Kalinitch remains, both in Russia and England, the kind old drudge. It was an English Kalinitch who refused a few months ago to press his master for arrears in wages that were due to him under the agricultural workers' award. The master had given him £10—but owed him £70. This is the peasant who in England forbids his children to plunder the nests of the birds because they are "God's children." In Russia he is Kassyan of the *Sportsman's Sketches*, who rebukes those who take life wantonly, who says, "Many they are, the wild things of the wood and the fields, and the wild things of the rivers and marshes and moors, flying on high or creeping below; and a sin it is to slay them"; and who adds, in words that recall an ancient belief handed down through immemorial



ages, "Blood is a holy thing! God's sun does not look upon blood; it is hidden away from the light—it is a great sin to bring blood into the light of day." The peasant character springs from the life of Nature: when on the heights, as in *A Living Relic*, it feels even pain as a proof of the unity of all life.

The peasant it is who merges in the dreamer. And the dreamer is the foundation-stone of all Turgenev's work, the warp and woof of all his weaving. It is not Bazarov to whom he incessantly recurs, but to the Lears and Hamlets of the steppes, to the Rudins who, with their eyes fixed on the far horizon, talk endlessly from noon to grey dawn. Over against these he places those who, like Solomin in *Virgin Soil*, work at a small thing, say a factory or a creamery, pending the moment when the hour strikes for the revolution.

There is the great final touch of Turgenev's genius: for, contemporary of Thackeray as he was, he has set down on paper precisely the attitude towards existence that is ours to-day. For we are all thinking of the revolution, either denying its approach or expecting it, either talking about it at large or getting on with our present job, like people who await the day of judgment with a bit of knitting in their hands—*pour passer le temps*.

That is how we feel, whether we desire the revolution or hate it. But that attitude of people watching for a signal is precisely the feeling that prevails throughout Turgenev's world.

The Russian genius has fired the temper of Western Europe.

## CHAPTER IV

### TCHEHOV

WHY am I reminded of Tchegov when I catch the scent of a passing cigar on a frosty outdoor night? Why, when a green-grocer tells me that if he shuts his shop-door he loses half his day's customers, or when I long to see the deserts or the steppes, do I think again of the author of *Uncle Vanya*? Is it not that life is but a series of sensations; that the green-grocer has learnt how easily people are turned from their purpose; and that in thinking of all the places I might have seen—and haven't—I recognise myself as one of those *Three Sisters* who never packed a bag and got into the train for Moscow? For it is about such things as these that Tchegov tells us.

In one of his letters he describes how he used to sit on the edge of the pond at Melihovo to watch the shoals of little fishes in it. It is the little fishes that Tchegov loves, and, since group psychology is his special business, he perceives them most vividly in shoal formation, as it were. Let him get hold of a family or a set of cronies and instantly one breathes with him the crony or the family air. And, since we are for the most part little fishes who swim in shoals, it is pleasant to feel ourselves among intimates who cannot possibly give themselves airs. To see Tchegov at work is to watch the cutting open of a pomegranate, so drab is the plain exterior of his typical group, so cunningly packed are the seeds within. Each seed, too, is alive, so that he provides a refuge from one of the great horrors of existence, the dread of swarming, multiplying human life. A man standing on the steps of the Mansion House may well feel, in certain moods, as though he were gazing into a toad-pit; the ever-moving, never-ending mass below produces giddiness and nausea. In Tchegov is the cure for this sensa-

tion, for does he not show that each unit of the horde is the centre of a psychic world, that each body is kept sweet by the life-breath? For to this man the leaves in the human forest, the drops in the human ocean, are not only alive, but full of secrets which they share with him.

This revelation of life in the ocean, in the forest of existence, is Tchegov's contribution to modern art. His work is like that of the scientist who, by plumbing the depths of the atomic world, finds there mysterious life: dense matter, like dense character, dissolves before the insight of the modern seer. Diving into the ocean of consciousness that is all about him, Tchegov feels the eddies and currents of it: this "grouping" that is so characteristic of him and so strange, considering his flashlight method, comes to him apparently from the mere spirit of the time, from the inspiration of the new communal instinct.

Yet, free swimmer as he is in the sea of feeling, Tchegov is by no means concerned with any theories as to the whence and whither of this ocean of life. To him its tides are but tides, forces that beat the shores according to rhythmic law, yet forces which ask no questions about what they have to do. When you ask of Tchegov what is the purpose of the show, or what is our precise place in it, he replies: "The devil himself could not make head or tail of it." In fact, his most characteristic phrase, when asked to account for the milk in the cocoa-nut, is just "The devil knows." Quite definitely he says: "It is time that writers, especially those who are artists, recognised that there is no making out anything in this world, as once Socrates recognised it, and Voltaire too." This attitude of mind is such an enormous relief that one can foresee for Tchegov a great popularity—as soon as people become intelligent enough to distinguish the more delicate shades in the rainbow of art.

In *The Cherry Orchard*, in *The Three Sisters*, and in dozens of the tales we find just a group of people circling round and round, like goldfish in a bowl, saying always, "I can't get out, I can't get out." The invocation which called these fools into a circle is a self-suggested attitude of mind. For they are not in a bowl, like the goldfish, they are in a cage—and the door is open. Yet they can't get out, because they think they can't.

But this is everybody's secret. It is the secret of Europe's dominion of fear to-day, as well as the secret of the man behind the counter, of the woman in the house. Even so, this is not the end of the matter: there is a dream connected with this illusion of imprisonment, a dream of an unfulfilled promise of Heaven. It is the dream we trust and not the business. For do not the broken-down gentry in the *Cherry Orchard* refuse to throw off the burden of debt? Do not the three sisters refrain from going to Moscow because they feel, very deep down in themselves, that it is better to keep a heaven in reserve? Shadowy trees, wrapped in a misty past that never was, or a Moscow under the light of romance, are far safer as happiness investments than brick-built villas or glittering mosques and plate-glass windows. It is better to dream of Bagdad than to go there: at least to some minds.

This is practically all the real wisdom that our sad old disillusioned race has reached—a distrust of realisation. No wonder there is silence at a Tchegov play, and then a sort of panic flutter as the curtain falls. For from these comedies of unbusinesslike folly one wades deep into subterranean rivers of the self within. Behind the laziness, behind the dream which is the camouflage of inertia, is the sense of exile. Behind it all is the beauty of a past—which never was, since each man cherishes a golden age of his own creation. This will be lost if the cherry orchard becomes a building plot. "Don't you hear voices . . . ? Oh, it's awful, your orchard is terrible; and when in the evening or at night you walk through the orchard, then the old bark on the trees sheds a dim light and the old cherry-trees seem to be dreaming of all that was a hundred, two hundred years ago, and are oppressed by their heavy visions." It is an essential part of our trickery to see our fears inevitably bound up with that ancient beauty which is "gone away upon the wind." Tchegov's genius is like the warmth which brings out on a page of common writing the invisible tracery of a palimpsest, the palimpsest that is my soul and yours.

Yet this subtlety is not strenuous, is even restful. For Tchegov's "note" is to acquiesce in this temper of a man, as one who perceives that irresolution and lack of purpose are as comfortable as old slippers. It is only to such men as



Lopakhin, who finds that "the only remarkable thing about the orchard is that it's very large," that inertia can appear annoying.

But the function of the bourgeois class is to breed Lopakhins. And do not the critics of Tchegov generally agree that what he painted in his characters was the mentality of a class that in Russia is passing away? Does he not look forward to the time when the businesslike Lopakhins will have displaced the easy dreamers? It is a doubtful conclusion: for when we look at middle-class England, can we honestly say that fear and inertia do really pass away with the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie?

Meanwhile, pending the complete electrification of the mind of man, Tchegov offers us rest. For all the other great playwrights, from Shakespeare to Ibsen and Shaw, construct their plays according to a formula which requires that their characters shall strip themselves from the start as athletes do before a race. Such and such a curve each person in the story has to describe in order that the pattern of it may be fully traced by the time the curtain is rung down. But nobody ever strips in Tchegov, since nobody is aware of the need to run a race; at least nobody ever takes such an idea seriously, though several people go about with elaborate "programmes of action." But these are merely pastimes, and everyone knows it. No, in Tchegov each comfortable slipshod soul carries about with it all the customary expedients for avoiding definite action. Not one of these people has ever given a serious thought to the dreadful strenuousness, the awful get-up-and-git spirit of Shaw, who would have everyone find out the exact job he has been set to perform by the inexorable Life Force and go instantly, like the window-cleaning boys in Do-the-Boys Hall, to do it on pain of damnation. Says Captain Shotover in *Heartbreak House*, "Learn your business as an Englishman—Navigation. Learn it and live, or leave it and be damned!"

There is the new gospel in a nutshell: the theory of the Life Force and each man's duty in regard to it. There is the new commandment as it commends itself to the clearest thinker of to-day, the new commandment—and the new hell. But Tchegov's people live in hell, the hell of purposelessness, and, like many of us, find it on the whole not so very intoler-

able. It is sometimes pleasant to hobnob with a devil of your own tastes. So, entirely freed from the Shavian obligation to carry out the commands of the Life Force, one can sit placidly cheek by jowl with Tchegov's folks. On the slightest provocation, or on none, Shaw is always ready to become cosmic in his views; Tchegov considers the cosmos inexplicable, or at any rate incomprehensible to human intelligence. One can enjoy him, therefore, as peacefully as one can Trollope, provided, of course, that one is bitten with a craze for taking one's pleasure subtly and can therefore get a thrill of unhomelike joy from the scent of wood-smoke and snow. In this atmosphere you will never find yourself hurried out of a warm, if ramshackle house, to view the dawn of a new age from the vantage-point of a windy mountain ledge. But this horrible thing any disciple of the Life Force may do to you at any moment. Tchegov himself had a sort of fear, apparently, that somebody might do it to him; or that the awful world force might somehow get him on its own account. He says: "I positively cannot live without visitors; when I am alone, for some reason I am frightened." By choice he swims among the surface shoals, but he knows the depths below depths that exist. The sea of life will never be mere glass to him.

We see the man himself more clearly than any of his Russian contemporaries; compared with the giants there is naturally far less to see. From his letters we know him as well as we do *The Darling* or the doctor in *Ward Number Six*. We see a quick man, doing things in dashes, composing a tale, treating a patient who has been stabbed in the stomach and plumped on his study floor, building, farming, gardening, taking a census, dashing to Sahalin and, incidentally, there numbering and talking to ten thousand people. Up at dawn, he enjoys the garden, though he has risen at one o'clock the night before to get down the "life" of a tale. He stays up every Easter night to hear the bells. That love of bells is very significant to anyone who knows how an ancient peal can grip the heart-strings with the memories of old things now forgotten—as we shall be forgotten. This man feels everything in flashes that sting his nerves. We have with him a sense of millions, as of a field full of folk, who only await his coming to rise to life for us. But in all this power to give life to wayside

existences there is little or nothing of the power to build up type-forms that we find in Turgenev. Nor is there any of that taste for architectonics which creates a design, building from foundation-stone to steeple a monumental structure in the abstract world.

Tchegov's comments on the women of Turgenev are interesting in this connection. Of these he says: "Except for the old woman in *Fathers and CHILDREN*—and the mothers as a rule—all Turgenev's girls and women are insufferable in their artificiality and—forgive my saying it—falsity. Lisa and Elena are not Russian girls, but some sort of Pythian prophetesses, full of extravagant pretensions—when one thinks of Tolstoi's Anna Karenina all these young ladies of Turgenev's, with their seductive shoulders, fade away into nothing." Lisa and Elena would seem false and unreal to the creator of the "darling," the wife, the witch, and the awful Jewess in *Mire*, because he knew nothing of the art which draws out of the essence of many women a living embodiment of the power which we call woman. Again, Tchegov had no use for women as creative forces; what he understood was the woman who serves the bed and board of a man. His apt phrase would be "that comfortable creature, woman," when woman, that is, is playing her part properly on the stage of life. And of course equally "that devil of a nuisance," when she isn't. Lisa and Elena are as caviare to him as would be a meal of honey and grapes to a man who longed for tripe and onions. The praise of Tolstoi's Anna comes from the same source, for Anna has passions, prejudices, and the charm of a domestic animal. Tchegov occasionally generalises about women, but always in homely fashion. He says of daughters when they judge their fathers that they are like sparrows, "you don't catch them with empty chaff." This would be quite comprehensible as a sentiment in the back parlour of a little shop.

For Tchegov was the grandson of a serf and had to work the serf out of himself. He had served in a shop and helped to support his family by manual toil. His art itself he derived partly from that old father whose passion was for conducting church choirs, but mainly from his mother and his old nurse. These simple women supplied the form and matter for his



work, the nurse by mysterious and terrible narratives, the mother by stories of the hard life of the serfs. Let this nurse have some of the credit for *The Black Monk*, and his mother, with her zeal for making people comfortable with food and drink, for *The Darling*. This natural origin of Tchegov's art gave him freedom from the intense agony, from the struggle to find the *mot juste*, of the great French masters, of a Flaubert or Maupassant. They toiled like men beating out the shape of hammered iron in a furnace; Tchegov only had to fly true—true to the instincts of the heart. When once he saw the inner reality, all was right. Swallow-flight is the word for his art. He wrote as he lived, as he swam, and of sea-bathing he says: "It is so nice that when I got into the water I began to laugh for no reason at all." So comes the vision of a human situation. The rest is but to make all clear, clear, clear.

That is his way, but he is not always free to follow it. Like Dostoevsky, like Tolstoi, he is sometimes held, pulled back, trammelled. One cry is his over and over again, because the human being is never at rest without a prick to kick against: "I should have liked to have been a free artist and nothing more." But it is not his sainthood, like Dostoevsky, nor the prophet's mantle as with Tolstoi, that holds him back from free artistry. It is nothing more or less than the obsession which tears at the heart of all the great moderns, so that, as artists, they are simply forced to "hunt two hares"; it is that ever-present sense of the misery of the world. This misery he is forced to see as a doctor in a land of recurring pestilence and famine. So he travels three thousand miles to inspect the convict station of Sahalin; he sends books to the schools there; he publishes reports of the terrible conditions; in a famine year he collects subscriptions to buy horses that in spring they may be distributed among the peasants for the sowing of the corn; he builds three schools and makes a high-road; in cholera time he takes charge, sole charge, of a section, and does it for nothing; he starts a public library at his native town; he makes plans for a People's Palace in Moscow, hunting the hare of philanthropy because nobody who is alive can be a free artist in Russia, or, for that matter, in Europe. Tchegov's supremely glorious definition of culture is that it makes the heart ache for what the eye does not see.



But in this country such rough order as is implied by roads, hospitals, libraries, and public relief has long been imposed by the efforts of that very middle class which Tchegov depicts with insidious irony. *Petit bourgeois* on his lips means much the same as it does on Lenin's. It means to Tchegov someone who has failed in the first duty of *bourgeois* man—the diffusion of comfort, first of his own and then that of his neighbours; and this last for the good bourgeois reason that, if your neighbour is fever-stricken, you or your children will catch fever. But this is exactly what the Russian *bourgeois* does not know—yet. Or did not in Tchegov's time. For this reason it is natural to ask: How would Tchegov have written had he been an Englishman?

Supposing, of course, that he succeeded in penetrating through the thick layers of surface insensitiveness with which we are in the habit of keeping ourselves from shocks, he would have found inertia, due to fear and the love of illusion, but an inertia capable of being vitalised by the threat of discomfort, of physical want. Englishmen may slack for a season, but let an Englishman once realise that he is "up against it" and he straightway finds his business sense. It is almost always not the business, but the dream, that he forgoes. His life is therefore apt to be an engaging saunter on the edge of an abyss, varied with prompt "recoveries" at intervals. It is a bewildering process for a foreigner to watch, since it shows a man alternately alert and as sleepy as Rip van Winkle. It is not only the well-kept English home that testifies to our English love of comfort: far more eloquent in this way is the faculty we possess for building oubliettes in our souls, oubliettes which we seldom or never explore. This faculty of concealment must inevitably have clipped the wings of a Tchegov. It would, for instance, have made it impossible for an English professor to sense the agony of approaching death as the Russian professor does in that wonderful bit of realism, *The Dreary Story*. Nor would an Englishman ever confess, as does the hero in *The Duel*, the mortal longing which comes over a man when he thinks of—what he has not got. We, too, can feel, "I must run away—there to the North. To the pines and the mushrooms, to people and ideas"; but we know perfectly well that when we were in the North we wanted the

South. We cannot so frankly yield ourselves to our moods. And so I shall never see the steppes or the deserts. Instead, I shall hug a bliss that's dim-described because it's cheaper every way. My business faculty has seized the upper hand in me. I feel that the gentleman in *The Statue and the Bust* got more joy out of the lady by his rides than ever he would have by an elopement. This must be the final wisdom of Nirvana : when the souls come down to the edge of the river of birth and refuse to plunge in.

It may be that this is the final sentence of Tchehov's wisdom ; but if so, he does not indicate it. He, indeed, since he is an artist first and foremost, indicates no philosophy at all. You confuse, he says, "two things, solving a problem and stating a problem correctly. It is only the second that is obligatory for the artist." It is this commandment which Tchehov actually obeys, realising, as he does, that for men whose business it is to observe life he is as necessary "as a star is to an astronomer." His boast is true, for he provides material. He is like a "medium" who colours no message that comes through with his own temperament. In his finest work he is pure white glass. When he tells a story of a woman with a passion for mothering a man, as in *The Darling*, he tells it without comment : it is his very lack of comment that makes the old lion, Tolstoi, stand ramping on his hind-legs, all afire to moralise and point a lesson. He can bleach a tale of primitive lust, as in *Mire*, till one forgets to realise that it is a man who tells it. More dispassionate reporting there could not be. If Tchehov is not a free artist, who is ?

When one actually sees his art in all its naked simplicity one understands his saying that Dostoevsky's work is "over-pretentious," for the creator of the Karamazov Brothers is one who must needs explore the many mansions of the divine, the diabolic, in man ; but Tchehov's holy of holies is just the human body with its health and intelligence, its talent, inspiration, and love. He is for the daylight, no dweller among fever-dreams, a happy, active man who puts all his sadness into his books, pouring out his bitterness as did that scorpion which Ibsen kept on his desk. When he gets home after the failure of *The Seagull*, Tchehov takes a dose of castor-oil and a cold bath. He is then ready to write another play.

Yet, after all, this freest of all free artists does not escape the question of direction, of the ultimate direction of art and life. Does he not say: "Let me remind you that the writers who, we say, are for all time or are simply good, and who intoxicate us, have one common and very important characteristic: they are all going towards something and are summoning you towards it too. . . . The best of them are realists and paint life as it is, but through every line's being soaked in the consciousness of an object you feel, besides life as it is, the life which ought to be, and that captivates you"?

"Soaked in the consciousness of an object"; no words could more directly describe the peculiar quality of Tchegov's work. But this artist, who puts the question to the jury, resolutely refuses to pass sentence.

And then, once and once only, he suddenly puts down in plain words the religion of to-morrow as it is beginning to emerge in the minds of scientists and thinkers: "Modern culture is only the first beginning of work for a great future, work which will perhaps go on for tens of thousands of years, in order that man may, if only in the remote future, come to know the truth of the real God—that is not, I conjecture, by seeking in Dostoevsky, but by clear knowledge, as one knows twice two are four."

After all, there is no escape from the Life Force, not even for Tchegov. The only point in which he differs from Shaw is that he puts the truth of God forward by tens of thousands of years. It is the Englishman—or the Irishman—who gets down to brass tacks and describes this God here and now. Even in the uttermost parts of the earth . . .

## CHAPTER V

### ANATOLE FRANCE

OF all the characters in this book of great men Anatole France is the most difficult of approach. In front of him one stands as before a great mountain, wondering at what point it is best to start on our tour of exploration. He is made up of paradox : on the surface the most gay and cynical of men, he yet lives most vividly in the religious ages of the past, and no one can be tenderer than he towards suffering, no one fiercer against injustice shown to the weak. He believes that there is a spell laid upon man which forces him to return back from civilisation to savagery, the mere spell of an inevitable change in the climate of our planet. To him, at best, man is but a gorilla ; yet no one believes more firmly than he that it is worth while to work for better conditions for this gorilla. He believes that, next to illusion, the one true boon of existence is desire, yet all his life he has been neglectful of wealth, though he is a collector of antiques. The only desire that he values is the love of woman, and he wrote *Thais*, into which is gathered all the sensuous glory of earthly love. Yet he also made his *Life of Joan of Arc* a marvellously lucid expression of simple faith. He produced the savage satire of *Penguin Island*, the sentimentality of *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*, the superb *gauloiserie* of *At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque*, the pity of *The Garden of Epicurus*, the hard and bitter cynicism of *The Gods are Athirst*, the coldness of *The Procurator of Judea* and the hot passion of love and jealousy in *The Red Lily*. Finally he sees himself both now and always as an old man ; sometimes he is a disillusioned bourgeois, sometimes a jolly old Churchman, sometimes a philosopher, sometimes an old and gentle scholar, and sometimes a man of unabashed and fleshly coarseness. He is regarded currently as a novelist, but, with the



doubtful exception of *The Red Lily*, he has never written a novel, though he is a master of the short story. He is most realistically, most fantastically, concerned with the doings of people on this earth, yet, with the exception of the four books on M. Bergeret, he has created by the help of the Comic Spirit a Platonic over-world in which what we actually perceive are the sublime archetypes of the people who walk about on two legs here below.

There is no end to his contradictions: he is a supreme stylist, yet his books run into fabulous numbers in France; and even in England, where style is nothing accounted of, he is being more and more widely read. In his life he is the most aloof of philosophers, yet when he comes on the platform at an English Labour meeting, the whole company will rise to greet him as though he were at least a demi-god of the people. He is truly acclaimed as the great master of Form in art, yet it is always against Form in morals that he protests; system is to him the great cause of all the crimes and cruelties which have stained, and still stain, the annals of human history. The two demons that have cursed us are in his eyes Religion and organised Justice; for have not these both led to the denial of that one true guide to right action, the heart of man? Yet when you have safely reached this coign of vantage in the kingdom of strangeness which is the mind of Anatole France, he will straightway whirl you off into a disquisition on monkeys, and their habits. And monkeys are, to Anatole France, merely men. But how can one safely rely on the heart of a gorilla, however educated he may be? And are not systems, even the rough-and-ready system of the Law which we call justice, and the conventions which we call religion, safer, after all, than that reliance on the heart of a gorilla which he would seem to advocate? For the gorilla is the king of the jungle, and certainly Anatole France is completely free from that superstitious admiration of the jungle law that has afflicted so many philosophers and politicians.

When we have answered these questions we shall be very near the comprehension of Anatole France's mind.

The first point to realise about this man who unlocked his heart in *The Garden of Epicurus* is that he is Latin through and through. We see this even in that boyhood of his in Paris,

of which he has given us such exquisite and tender pictures. There he had before him the family, the ancestral piety of hearth and home, the beautiful Latin city and the spirit of the classic world in his education. The family is a place of seclusion where one can dream because of the gracious powers that guard it. Piety is there in his mother, and that naughtier thing that Grandmamma brings, the defiance of obedience, formality, and humility. The Romans knew this, for they deliberately instituted the Saturnalia ; the boy Anatole seems to have enjoyed a perpetual Saturnalia whenever the jolly old Grandmother was about the house. And as for his mother, the piety she infused into her child's surroundings was the formal religion of the Frenchwoman. From the method of speeding the dead to the rites of the Mass and the purchase of votive candles, French Catholicism is the most precise creed in the world. There is no mystery in its completely business-like method of dealing with the facts of Life and Death and Love. From it a child must emerge either " darned sure about everything " or convinced that the Unknown must remain the Unknowable, if such rites and creeds as these are the only means by which we can come to grips with the Unseen. Anatole France, at any rate, reached the same conclusion about these things as Renan.

The next, and probably the most powerful, influence in France's boyhood was classic literature. He lost prizes at school because this was a real thing to him ; he dreamt himself away into another and a more beautiful world than that of to-day. In this absorption of the lad, Anatole, in the ancient inspiration of Greece and Rome, we have the first beginning of that which was to torture him throughout his life, the contrast between the actual and the ideal, between what is and what might be, yet what cannot be. This is the pessimism of Anatole France. He is always tortured by one thing : by the universal tendency towards cruelty and hatred that is evident in every step that is taken by man, the gorilla. It is this gorilla who questioned Joan of Arc and sent her to the stake, but wept when she was on the road there. It is this eternal gorilla who forged documents against an innocent man in the Dreyfus Affair ; this gorilla baptised the penguins and brought on those innocent creatures all the curses that follow

on religion. The savagery of the revolutionists in that appalling book, *The Gods are Athirst*, is out of the monkey-house ; so, too, is the rage of fornication that burns in the *Histoire Comique*, and is sandwiched between passages of immortal loveliness in *The Fall of the Angels*. This gorilla is in Anatole France always a beast, but often a lovable one. He makes up the power of France's finest book, *At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque*. Yet he always remains, even in the great Abbé Jérôme Coignard, a beast, even as he did when Aristophanes put him on the Greek stage, and the Latin Comedy writers on the Roman.

No Northern writer has ever ventured gaily into this beast's den save on a mere light-hearted skirmish, a child's dash in and out. But Anatole France, as Rabelais has done before him, takes the creature by the beard, fondles his bloody chops, and frisks between the terrible paws. The Latin has a genuine love and sympathy for the creature ; he would not have him gone, for how poor would be the world without this Lust of Life.

It is curious to compare, for instance, the theme of sexual bestiality in the opening chapters of Björnson's *Heritage of the Kurts* with the same subject in Anatole France. In the Northern writer it is the suffering that follows in its train that strikes him : he is out to kill the beast. And the whole of the long book that follows is simply an account of how the great Ape in the Kurt family, the lust in their blood, is trapped and rendered harmless. But where Björnson sees the suffering of the victims of the Ape, Anatole France sees nothing but the joy of the great beast, whose gambols are an everlasting source of merriment and pleasure. He apparently notices no victims ; or, at any rate, he refuses to explore those dark corners of the cave where, peradventure, one might come upon the bones of them.

Probably the widest gulf in the world is that which yawns between the soul of the Latin and the soul of the man of the North. It is even, in many respects, less easily bridged than the chasm between East and West. For the West often produces minds bent, like those of the East, on expressing the infinite in terms of the finite, for is not the longing to do this the very secret spring which produces the music and philosophy of Germany and the poetry of the Celt ? And is not the dream-



ing soul of Russia ultimately explicable only in terms of the ancient hymns of India ?

But between the Latin and the man of the North it is hard to find any link like these. For the Latin intelligence seems to come into existence fully shaped and armed, like Minerva from the head of Jove ; it does not seem traceable in its several stages back to the original embryo. But northern minds have a trick of trailing clouds behind them ; they often appear to be like mist wreaths which take shape at last and solidify into forms that, we feel, may easily dissolve again into the cloud from which they came. Therefore the typical mind of the North expresses itself in metaphysics, in music, in morality, in faith ; not in the faith which can easily define itself in rites, but rather in the obligations of an abstract duty which cannot frankly take things at their face value.

In the supremely important matter of sex this difference comes to a head. For the Latin, and perhaps especially the Frenchman, reckons with sex as it is on the surface ; that is, to him man is a polygamous creature but, at the same time, society can only be founded on the family. What the social order has to do is to reconcile two irreconcilables by publicly recognising the honour of the wife, while privately honouring the importance and dignity of the courtesan. The North has never been able to do this with a good conscience, and therefore the commerce of love in the North is even more brutal, probably, than it is in the Latin countries. For one undoubtedly kills a creature more cruelly when one is furtively ashamed of the act than when one regards killing as dignified since it is in the order of life's necessities. The courtesan, therefore, is to the Frenchman very much what she was in classic times ; that is, a priestess of beauty, grace and joy. The romance of love, then, in Anatole France is to be found in the Latin mode ; that is, either as emanating from the innocence, the tremendously exaggerated, innocence of the young girl, or, more delightfully, from the expert in love, the woman who is a professional.

There is nothing like this in English literature, not even in the frankness of to-day. Meredith, when he wrote *Modern Love*, was typical in this respect, for what he expressed is the one feeling which Englishmen, in general, will frankly acknow-



ledge—that he was in agony because he had made a mistake. We are profoundly attached in this country to our mistakes in love : we found, not one school of novels on the theme, but many. For we recognise the passing of love, not as a law, but only as a freak. We make mistakes in affinity, that is all we will acknowledge. Affinity of heart is what we must have : at least in our finer moments, however frank we may be in other moments. And in all our moments, whether frank or not, we see the inevitable exploitation of the woman that follows from this commerce of the sexes. The North, in fact, is haunted by an illusion, or an ideal, which has pursued it ever since the days when the primitive Goths moved southward from their forests : it is that of comradeship between man and woman, and that in other matters than the flesh. It is, this comradeship, far more ideal than real ; but a man of the North is apt to be ruled by his ideals, by his prejudices, at least in his heart. But the Latin is never deserted by his sense of actuality, by his logic of the earth and its ways.

There is nothing of prejudice or squeamishness about Anatole France ; any more than there was in Rabelais, or in any of the great robust jesters about the Law of Appetite. A maid and a meal, a bottle or a kiss, are topics equally jolly, equally free from heart-searching, to the creator of M. l'Abbé Coignard as they are to him who begot Pantagruel. And Judith, the Jewess, in *At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque*, when she bestows her favours on one lover after another, enjoys the process quite as much as they do.

One form of suffering there is which, for all his tenderness towards misery, Anatole France has forgotten in his lusty humour ; it is the outcast woman, the woman on the slag-heaps of sexual traffic. Or if he has not quite forgotten, he sees, as he always does, that even here the joy is heightened by the pain. It is precisely the same with him when he is dealing with that matter of the beast in the shambles. In the *Elm Tree on the Mall* there is a most unforgettable picture of Butcher Lafolie and his wife and son ; all three of them are indeed “ saturated with the blood of beasts.” But one has not yet heard that Anatole France ever joined the ranks of the vegetarians.

The Latin genius will have “ no truck ” with illusions ; to it,

life is founded on appetite ; and the satisfaction of all appetite implies death, suffering, and sacrifice. We die to live and others die that we may live. Without death, even in the act of love and creation, there can be no renewal of life. And therefore Anatole France writes tremendous jests, whole chapters of jests, on the mock virtue, virginity, and trounces the good soul who went into a bookseller's shop simply to denounce the picture of a naked woman that was shown therein. " Oh ! the silly greybeards," he cries through Jérôme Coignard, " who in the midst of all the uncleanness of a Babylon where every lifted curtain shows the eye or arm of a courtesan, where busy humanity touch and quicken one another in the public squares, fall a-groaning and complaining of a few naughty pictures hung up on booksellers' stalls." Life, says he, being just Desire, " that great boon of existence," what folly it is to strain at a gnat and all the time to keep a gullet wide enough to swallow a camel.

On this matter Anatole France has no illusion at all; yet to him the only things that make life bearable are its illusions. But then he also classifies these, dividing them into those which are serviceable and those which are merely destructive lies.

In this process of wise classification his two guides are Epicurus and St. Francis of Assisi. " Epicurus," he says through the mouth of l'Abbé Coignard, " freed the soul from empty fear and taught it to proportion its idea of happiness to its miserable nature and feeble powers. Good St. Francis, tenderer and more material, led the way to happiness by interior vision, and would have had souls expand like his in joy, and in the depths of an enchanted solitude. Both were helpful, one to destroy illusions that deceive, the other to create illusions from which one does not wake." This passage is indeed pregnant with meaning ; and to understand it is well worth while, if only that we may be made humbler, kinder, and, with all deference to Latin logic, that we may be made stronger in the faith—which is not that of Anatole France.

St. Francis saw, of course, a world of spirit in which Poverty, Death, and all the strange forms of mortal circumstance, together with the creatures of earth and sky, were transformed into agents of love and service ; from the birds up to the archangels, all the hosts of earth and sky and water were

brothers of men, working through him and with him. This is an illusion, says Anatole France, but since it is a kindly one, we shall all be happier and more gentle if we can tear ourselves away from the Palace of the Ugly Truth into the Paradise of Dream, where Death is kind and Poverty blessed. This is the spirit of Pity and Irony, the twin deities of his soul, which M. France cultivates deliberately in order that he may soften the gorilla nature in himself and others.

Epicurus is, however, the greater soul, for he keeps us in mind of our "miserable nature and feeble powers." In this dreadful saying Anatole France, in whom the flower of the Latin genius comes to a head, sweeps away all the aspirations of the race. For him evolution might be—nay, is—a word never uttered by human lips. And all the long way that the race has traversed from the arboreal times till to-day counts with him not at all. The best that he can say for us is this : "It is true that when human societies attain to a certain degree of refinement, they turn aside from the manners of a menagerie, and that it is evidence of progress to live in a cage, instead of wandering miserably in the woods." The gorilla, man, is only caged. And, as Dr. Trublet, another of M. France's doubles, expresses it, "Morality is a mutual agreement to keep what we possess."

So much for the present and the past ; as for the future, it, of course, is already in existence like the third, but invisible, side of a triangle. "We shall all be swallowed up one day, every one of us, and we know it : the wisest thing is to forget about it."

For the picture which most frequently haunts the soul of Anatole France is that of the starry heavens, each star of which is born, and dies. The whole is naught to him but a vast symbol of that perpetual flux and reflux which is the law of all existence. Eternal change is what he sees in the heavens, in the hills, in the veins and souls of men ; he agrees profoundly with M. Bergeret's dog, Riquet, who believes that all is flux and reflux, but who adds the solemn words, "I alone remain." Anatole France cannot follow Riquet there, since he does not feel that anything remains, not even the human race itself. And then his fancy paints a picture of the last savage on earth sitting half-frozen amid the barren wastes of the dying earth.



All the efforts of the hard-working gorilla—even M. France does not deny him this virtue—will be as though they had never been. It may be, in fact, that the insect will rule where once the jungle beast built his proud but squalid cities.

Anatole France allows himself illusions, for without them he could not live, but he denies himself the greatest of all, the belief that behind the birth and death of worlds, as of men, there is a living spirit; and behind the electron, a Will. He cannot see the candles in the sky that light up the pathway of the gods.

That "illusion" has never, in truth, been part of the Latin, or the classic, mind, for the utmost that the Greeks could see was Destiny. To this Destiny Anatole France also subscribes when he speaks of a Force outside man. Virgil, whom Anatole France looks to as his Master, saw but a race of shadows when he thought of the souls that once were men. For no true Southern loses himself gladly in immensity; and the greatest good the spirit of the South can conceive is not fulness of life, but perfection of life: the perfection of life's exquisite moments.

Everything in Anatole France's philosophy exists, indeed, to serve that moment; and since the glory of light is essentially a matter of contrast, shadow is necessary to it, the shadow of pain and ugliness. That truth is the very essence of *The Garden of Epicurus*. "Evil is necessary. If it did not exist, neither would good. Evil is the sole potential cause of good. What would courage be without danger, and pity without pain? . . . It is thanks to evil and sorrow that the earth is habitable and life worth living. . . . Each vice you destroy had a corresponding virtue, which perishes along with it."

In this view the hour, if it ever should come, when mankind can sing "Le diable est mort" will be the hour that sounds the knell of joy. "Sweet indeed is pleasure after pain"; that is indeed a truth. But the devilish part of the business is that most people's sweetness comes after others' pain; for the principle of the division of labour goes back to that moment when things went wrong in Eden.

At present mankind is trusting to the glorious principle which the psychologists call "sublimation" to get us out of the impasse of light and shadow in the moral realm. "Trans-



form " is the word now, the word to conjure with, when it comes to vice and passion. But Anatole France has no place in his scheme for any notion of that kind ; it is to him but jugglery and illusion. And Good and Evil are, in his view, too closely interwoven ever to be unravelled. Men can never, he believes, lay up for themselves anything useful or beautiful save pity. Yet the devil has lost, and will lose, a great deal of his devilishness. Anatole France evidently believes with his understudy, M. Bergeret, that " men are least ferocious when they are least wretched, that in the long run the progress of industry will produce a certain softening of manners," and that " the artificial ills arising out of social conditions will no longer be added to those that are inevitable, commonplace and august, which arrive out of our human state. . . . The slave will come out of his cell and the factory will no longer devour the bodies of millions.

" And I anticipate that this delivery will come from machinery itself. . . . The day will come when the employer, growing in moral beauty, will become a worker among the liberated workers, when there will be no more wages, but only an exchange in kind."

Here, then, is the origin of Anatole France's Socialism, for, like the Victorians before him, he looks to nothing less than " a hair of the dog that bit them " to cure the evils of a society founded on mass production. And an amelioration of the economic evils will be followed, he believes, by gentler manners on the part of the—gorilla, who may, in time, come to regard the whole race as his own family. Compared with conditions to-day, that would be Paradise ; yet it would express no joys actually different in kind from the joys, the consciousness, of to-day's best moments. Happiness will still be a matter of the exquisite moments, though these may be more frequent, more widely diffused and more beautiful than of old. The joy of them must still depend on shadow and be the sweeter for the pain out of which they rise. And for the finer souls the true refuge will be that Tower of Ivory in which the artist enshrines in word or stone, in sound or pigment, those arrested moments of delight which overcome oblivion and survive the ages.

In this matter Anatole France is a true classic humanist,

perhaps almost the last of the race; for is he not able to revert to the joy of a Pagan day before the religion of sorrow had brought yet another shadow to the earth, before a ban had been set on the pure joy in animal pleasure which is called sensuousness? Anatole France's mind is like a room with oaken panels and hangings stained, not in Tyrian purple, but by the sunlight of the past centuries; the air of it is sweet with the flowers of a thousand summers, made ominous by the memory of a thousand unforgotten tragedies. His soul is surcharged with these things: his vision is filled with the loveliness and terror of the forms which now exist but in the dreaming mind.

"What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

These are but figures of illusion, it is true, yet figures lacking which our race would be indeed but bestial.

Yet Anatole France's humanism, if by humanism we mean echo, the echo of past love and life, is not merely classic, it is Christian, too, since, for all his denial of the hope which Christ would seem to have brought, no one was ever more poignantly touched with the tender pity of Christ than he; not even excepting the little Saint of Assisi. For, if Anatole France's art owes everything in its form to the spirit of Rome, the temper in which he deals with that form is purely Christian, purely pitiful. His intellect is Roman, but his heart, like Renan's, is possessed with the vision of Him who walked in Galilee. This means that M. France has, as a humanist, known how to make the best of two worlds, the pagan and the Christian, for he has taken the exquisite moments of both and mingled them into a new and most moving art. His great short story, *The Procurator of Judea*, has been regarded, because of its last sentence ("Jesus?" he murmured, "Jesus—of Nazareth? I cannot call him to mind . . ."), to be a cynical reflection on Christianity. It is, of course, an ironical reflection on the blindness of the great; on how ignorant they are of the true meaning of the events and characters that pass before them.

Jesus is to M. France a tremendously important fact ; but then so is that Venus of the myrtle-grove who gives life to all that come into the flesh.

Anatole France's humanism is, by reason of the two worlds, the two inspirations, that come together in it an extraordinarily subtle thing. All the beauty of asceticism, all the joy of sensuousness, is in it at its greatest moments. For we may ask, What would the smile of the Gioconda mean for us if we did not see in it all the kisses that men have pressed on women's lips ? But Anatole France suggests in *Thais*, and elsewhere, not kisses only, but the denials of them : and that on the same lips. Subtlety can no further go.

M. France is, in this kind, one of the great givers of joy. The " news from Venus," from the planet, that is, may be bad ; it is likely to be so if all the planets are just racing to dusty death, but meanwhile—we can snatch a few joyous moments for, after all, every June brings roses and every rose is the lovelier if we remember the roses that have been ; and especially if we can still see the faded roses which Botticelli threw across the sea from which his Venus rises.

The one man with whom Anatole France would have been most in sympathy out of all this company of great artists is Turgenev. The Russian artist is no humanist, but he matches the Frenchman in that supreme gift of form, of masterly identification of the expression with the thing expressed. And this, next to his humanism, is Anatole France's finest gift as artist. Yet his " form " is not in the least what we understand by form in England : it is not architectural in its inspiration ; it does not build up a design in which every detail is carefully calculated to serve a definite end. M. France apparently ends many of his books because he has filled a certain number of pages which are convenient to the book-binder. Even the *Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*, crowned as it was by the Academy, is badly constructed from the point of view of plot. His " form " is, again, a matter of the perfect moment.

In this mode the Concert of Giorgione is one of the most perfect pictures in the world, because in it we perceive, passing across the faces on the canvas, like a breath, the spirit of joy. The invisible has become visible in such a fashion that we



forget, not only paint and canvas, but the actual features of the faces upon which we are gazing ; that is, we see them only as a pure medium of emotion. This is the art of Anatole France ; he, too, expresses, not with paint, but in perfect cadences of sound, the invisible gift brought by the passing moments. Thus, as an artist, it is not in M. Bergeret's disquisitions or in the bitter ironies of *Penguin Island* that Anatole France reaches his highest point. It is rather in such moments as when he catches the pang of the lad Piedagnol in *The Elm Tree on the Mall* when he is flung out of the Church, an exile for ever from the peace of piety ; or when M. l'Abbé Guitrel, listening avidly to the actors mouthing their parts on the stage, stuffs the bread into his mouth in order that he may spare himself the pangs of hunger and yet go to morning Mass next day on a stomach that is, technically speaking, empty. The flash of pity, the flash of exquisite irony, is in both these "moments." The same artistic power is shown in *The Life of Joan of Arc* when the impression to be conveyed is the fantastic world of universal fear in which a devil may be swallowed on a lettuce-leaf, or come out at a lying-in. M. France's art is fine enough here to be able to bring back, not the past events, but the very air of the period that made these events possible.

It is this power of giving his readers the event of the moment and the soul of it all in one that makes Anatole France, for all his subtlety, one of the truest interpreters of simplicity. Wordlessness, to this great master of words, is very pitiful. He seems to feel the pathos of it in his very depths. Therefore he is able to make his story *Crainquebille* a masterpiece of pity and comprehension. That itinerant vendor of vegetables is, when he gets into the hands of the police, a dumb image, like the Christ, of all that helplessness suffers at the hands of so-called Justice. Yet no one wishes ill to Crainquebille, and, in fact, the very man who feels most good will towards him is the man who inflicts on him the deadliest injury. Every magistrate ought to be made to pass an examination in *Crainquebille* before he takes his seat on the Bench. For M. France is great enough to see the unseen ; and most of those who "judge" are not. Again, the passage where M. Bergeret talks with Pied d'Alouette, the tramp from whom "They" had



taken his one joy, his knife, is perhaps the most strangely beautiful instance in literature of the insight of the great and subtle into the heart of the small and simple.

Anatole France may refuse us our most cherished illusions and fling his gorilla in our faces. But he makes amends. For if he, learned, subtle, the fruit of all the ages of culture, as he is, can become one with Piedagnol in a sudden flash of insight, then how is it possible to deny the underlying unity of all souls? It is impossible also to escape the reflection—that M. France's gorilla has become master of a tremendous amount of sympathy and understanding.

By universal consent the summit of Anatole France's art was reached in *At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque*. It is perhaps a pity that the word *rôtisserie* (cookshop) was not retained in the English title. For the grease of that cookshop is part of the picture.

It is possible to contend that the events of actual life take place only that they may supply material for works of art; and that, therefore, the Prussian entry into Berlin was justified because the spectacle of it fired Ibsen to the writing of *Brand*. By the same line of reasoning, if we want a *raison d'être* for the existence in life of the elements called, romantically, Woman, Wine and Song, we shall find it in Anatole France's masterpiece. For in *At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque* we have Women, Wine and Song in its lowest and most squalid shape. In it there is no sitting at banquets by flower-crowned folk; not a single rose-shaded light is thrown on the company there gathered together. And what a company it is! A turnspit, an old reprobate of an Abbé, a still more degraded Capuchin friar, a madman, a genial bunch of extremely lustful sylphs and salamanders, and two, three ladies whom it would be exceedingly complimentary to call "light." The centre point of the whole is a feast where the guests thievishly eat and drink, where they gamble and sing mad songs. Out of such a topic and such materials Anatole France could not possibly have made a masterpiece were he not entirely free from the taint of sentimentality. He is a showman of these reprobates, but a showman without disguises. His people are so abandoned, in fact, that the climax comes when, on the very grave of the Abbé, one of his friends makes love to his mistress, whilst

another disciple looks on enviously from the churchyard wall. This stroke of irony, a truly Francesque exposition of the theme of Love and Death, would be horrible were it not that we realise how much the Abbé would himself have enjoyed it, had he been privileged to take part in the scene in any other capacity but that of a corpse.

It is M. l'Abbé Coignard himself, of course, who lifts this theme and these characters into the region of great and consummate art. His clothes, being full of holes, let in wind and rain at every point ; he is often drunk and wine-stained ; he is not unacquainted with the gutter, and he traffics in church porches with Catherine & Co. of the streets. He is a rascal who gathers genial rascals round him. Yet he is one of the greatest of men, and that for one reason : he has entirely escaped the great shadow which dogs the footsteps of all other men, but particularly of good men. He is utterly free from Pharasaism, and thanks God daily and hourly that he is as other men are. All that is human he truly takes upon himself ; all that is ignoble, that is. Nothing could possibly shock him in another, for he is that other. Seeing the evil man pass, he cries : " There goes Jérôme Coignard." He finds over the whole earth nothing but brothers and lovers because there is no one in existence for whom he could feel the faintest tremor of scorn. Like the sun, Jérôme Coignard shines on all alike. *At the Sign of the Reine Pédaque* is as full of sunlight as a ripe peach, as jolly with laughter as men are in harvest time. The laughter of the gods comes to us from the South ; from Rabelais, Gogol and Anatole France ; great laughter that shakes the sides.

But why did Anatole France fix his scene of riotous mirth in the past ? Is it not because he knew well, sad soul as he is, that human beings can only laugh truly in a past they have largely forgotten, or in a future that is mainly unknown ? Heart-free laughter is the rarest of all things, both in life and literature : in Jérôme Coignard it is Bacchanalian. Such laughter is earth's excuse for existence, earth with all its lust. It makes holy many things that are dreadful with avid hunger, even as the beauty of a child is the supreme excuse for desire.

But here is, once more, M. France's gorilla ; the very beast

that walked the jungle. Here, too, in sylph and salamander, is the fantasia of the imagination.

Anatole France is like a god who, being asked what excuse there is for his having made man, bows gracefully towards the ragged, wine-stained Abbé, and says : “ My excuse, messieurs.”





*PART VI*  
**THE BUILDERS**

CHAPTER I.—SAMUEL BUTLER

CHAPTER II.—DOSTOEVSKY

CHAPTER III.—WALT WHITMAN AND EDWARD CARPENTER

CHAPTER IV.—THOMAS HARDY

CONCLUSION



## CHAPTER I

### SAMUEL BUTLER

ONE of the successors of that invaluable woman, Molière's housekeeper, was shown a portrait of Samuel Butler in middle age and asked what she thought of him. After a pause for reflection, she answered: "He looks as if he had a stomach-ache, but when it's over, I think he's got a joke ready."

Is it not true, in fact, that those who have the real taste for Butler can scarcely tell whether they like him for the laughter or the stomach-ache?

Everyone suffers from that "stomach-ache" nowadays; everyone, that is, who cannot bring himself to crawl inside his own private cubby-hole and there live, hermetically sealed from the world outside. Usually it is the pain of the universe, that groaning and travailing of sentient creatures, which never ceases to sound its terrible rhythm in our ears. But what Butler heard was somewhat different from this: he was kind to the outcast cats of Clifford's Inn, he hated the righteous men who vivisect, and applauded Pauli when he made the mice from his Chambers "wards in Chancery" by letting them loose in the Vice-Chancellor's Court, but it was rather the meanness than the cruelty of life that drove Butler into the lists of those who struggle. And, since the meanness of either a house or a society implies meanness of design, it was to design that he applied himself.

When we think of Butler we see him standing in a Victorian dining-room, by the side of a frightful coal-scuttle and surrounded by clumsy tables and chairs, a solid man who is daily growing heavier in build and more pouched under the eyes. In youth he was apparently virile and muscular, and, bodily at any rate, would seem to have fulfilled his destiny more suitably as a miner or railway-man rather than as a

sedulous frequenter of the Museum Reading Room. It is only in his old age that the inner writing of the intellect has come out on his face. And of that "writing" we know what Butler himself thought when he found it in the features of his fellow-thinkers. He could see nothing in it but an ugly scar. Indeed, if we put Butler's portrait beside that of a Goethe or a Beethoven, we can make a shrewd guess as to why he set these men among the humbugs of the world.

Yet the secret of Butler's personality is that he loved beauty above all other things; honest beauty, that is, with no touch of the sham about it. The only grace he recognised is that which comes from lines that are truly expressive of the original design. Throughout the Age of Virtuous Sham it was Butler who insisted that, unless the bones of a thing are right, the whole thing is damned in lock, stock and barrel. Everything with him, from the laws of the universe to the theme of a fugue, from the shaping of a character to the structure of a church porch, was a matter of the purpose to be served. Given such and such a plan, he asks, is the expression of it inevitable?

But if the mind of a man is to apply consistently this rule of inevitable expression to definite design, and to apply it to all things in heaven and earth, the knife must be used freely; that is, the thinker must put out of the bounds of his consideration a number of great men whose personalities resemble huge vignettes, because the boundary lines of their characters cannot be drawn, since these fade away into the mystery of the unknown. Such men as these either form part of a vast design whose outlines we cannot guess at, much less discern, or they are madmen. "Ghosts," says a character in *Crime and Punishment*, "ghosts are as it were shreds and fragments of other worlds, the beginning of them. A man in health has, of course, no reason to see them, because he is above all a man of this earth, and is bound for the sake of completeness and order to live only in this life." Butler, being "a man of this earth," would neither see these uncanny shards of other worlds nor consort with those who said they saw them. One plane of consciousness was enough for him and, being in time, he refused to be bothered with the timeless world. Men not of this kidney he pushed resolutely aside, drawing up at different



times different catalogues of the Humbugs of the World, and finding it impossible to confine them to seven. "We agreed that Blake was no good because he learnt Italian at over sixty in order to read Dante, and we know Dante was no good because he was so fond of Virgil, and Virgil was no good because Tennyson ran him; and as for Tennyson—well, Tennyson goes without saying." For did not Blake, Dante and Virgil all conceive that they had caught glimpses of worlds far remote from ours; did not Tennyson declare that the goal which knowledge follows is

"Beyond the utmost bound of human thought"?

Such men were, of course, anathema to Butler, who conceived that Nature has produced nothing finer than peasants and fishermen, when, at any rate, these are born of the great races of the world. He was in love, this man of the Victorian parlour, with nothing on earth but the old Pagan life of "grace"; to this he turns in his dreams and in search of it he sets out on his travels. This grace which he invokes in the famous purple patch in *Life and Habit*, the grace that was even desired by "unlovely Paul," is nothing more or less than the joyous daily, care-free life in the sun which he found, in the most splendid form, in Homer, and persisting still, in humbler guise, among the Italian vine-dressers and fishermen of Sicily. It is Butler's ideal of earthly progress that, when man has explored the darkness, when science has pushed its way through that bitter period during which all men and things must needs be hideous, that then at last man may return to "the true grace, with her groves and high places, and troops of young men and maidens crowned with flowers, and singing of love and youth and wine . . ." That is, that men may once more live out the unconscious nobility of body and being which Butler worshipped all his life. True knowledge, he says, is, like true life, unconscious in its power. His hatred is kept for those who "know that they know too well to be able to know truly." Meanwhile we are in the age of science, and "science is like offences. It needs must come, but woe unto the man through whom it comes; for there cannot be much beauty where there is consciousness of knowledge, and while knowledge is still new it must in the nature of things involve much consciousness."

Who would, he asks, have the Venus of Milo taught to read? Yet no one knows better than Butler that we shall only breed another Venus from parents whose blood and nerves have been enriched by much reading, by much thought. This period of offences must be ugly with effort; and therefore Butler, lover as he was of the beautiful Isabella of Arona, must needs turn his back on her and face the library, the laboratory, and all the other horrors of that research which fronts the darkness in order that it may bring life; which grows ugly and lined in face in order that future generations may be more beautiful than any that have ever walked the earth. The only way to get over a thing is to go through with it: knowledge has to be won now or never.

Everything else is humbug; so Butler feels. The other worlds? What have we to do with them, we who have the groves of earth for our dwelling-place and our joyous part to play in the mighty incarnation of the Great Being who called into manifestation all the life that is; whose cells are the lives of man and beast? So to the gulfs of Dante; to the dark valleys of Virgil; to the planes of consciousness that were sensed by Goethe; to all the dealers in the "shreds and fragments" of strange worlds, Butler says what he said to the spooks of the séance room: "I get along quite nicely as I am. I don't want them to meddle with me."

In this matter Butler is at once the truest critic of English life and the most typical Englishman. For where the commonplace Englishman seeks his comfort by excluding from his consideration the small details which would disturb his peace, Butler closes his mind to the larger nuisances of thought. Nor is he satisfied with the homely sandbag on the window-sash which is just enough to keep out the draught without shutting off the view. He builds a wall between himself and these distracting visions of infinity. Consign them all to limbo is his cry: the spooks, the great Masters, and all the crew of those who play the Pied Piper to the fools here below. Man's business is with the perpetual renewal of life by death and generation; eternal life—all at any rate that we need of it is here in the unfolding of the great power whose body is made up of our bodies, the bodies of men and beasts; whose experience is for ever enriched by the gathered experiences of each

one of us, whether we be man, again, or beast ; or, for the matter of that, atom or molecule. What need have we, then, to imagine an Absolute with the metaphysician, or to discover a Summerland with the spiritualist ? We have our Absolute in the total memory of earth that is carried in the recesses of each creature's nature ; we have all the Summerland we want in the sunlight of to-day and in the possession, which might be ours, of splendid personalities, handsome, amorous and joyous, because free.

From damning the false lights of those older " humbugs " whom he could only see as misleading fools, Butler turned to his contemporaries. " A plague on them all, or almost all," he cries. For they cause the people to " splurge," to gyrate, like silly old women, round idols. The list of those whom Butler " couldn't abide " grew longer year by year ; it stretched from Darwin to George Eliot ; from Charlotte Brontë to poor Mrs. Ewing and her humble *Jackanapes*. He saw affectation and sentimentality everywhere, and everywhere, too, the dominance of an authority whose title no one paused to investigate. The smaller divinities of the scientific and literary Pantheon went the way of the great gods, or humbugs. " Off with their heads," said Butler, for every Jack and Jill of the lot, in his eyes, was just a tallow-candle surrounded by a circle of gnats. Plain song was what he wanted, with no " shifting diminished sevenths, nor augmented sixths tearing their hair," with no cross rhythms. In Handel's music you could find a broad and clear design, with no bizarre twisting for the sake of being bizarre. But the final mark of the beast was this : that the less design the prophets had to show, whether in art, in science or in theology, the more they pontificated. And therefore Butler took Pontifex for the name of the creature whom he most loathed on earth, and regarded pontification, that attitude of " when I ope my lips, let no dog bark," as the supreme symbol of the folly that was leading the world along the primrose path.

He set himself, therefore, to the work of smashing pontification in high and low, but particularly in high. In this business Butler shared a fairly common fate, for, when he went out to do a small thing, to chastise, if not to find, asses, he came upon a big discovery ; perhaps in some respects on nothing less



than a kingdom. For it was through that true passion in his heart for the bones, the structure, of everything, that he reached the new word, the new conception of life, for which men had been waiting so long. For a long while men had been turning from the idea of a God without, an old man with a beard and the hands that mould men and worlds, kneading them as a man kneads dough into shapes, to a God within, a God who moves by growth from within and who shapes creation as His body. By making such a God conceivable to the intelligence Butler put mind into the universe.

He started on this business most humbly as to method. He felt that this damnable habit of "pontificating" on the part of the few, the scientists and the theologians, would be made impossible once for all if the many could only be induced to form the habit of verifying the references given to them by these self-constituted guides. It is all a question, in religion as well as in science or art, of verifying your references. Is it the Resurrection that is in question? Then just turn up the accounts given in the Gospels and see what you find. Is it civilisation that you want to test? Then consider, not the ant, thou man who would be wise, but the machine. Turn up your references here and read them fairly and squarely. Just see what is the design traced by the evolution of the machine in the past and see if you like that design. Butler here resembles that Grammarian whose funeral Browning attended: he knew that you must "settle Hoti's business" and "properly base Oun," if you want to speak and not stammer. We cannot possibly put up with broken arcs down here if we have no perfect round in heaven wherewith to correct our mathematics. And Peter, wherever he is, has no doubt something better to do than to sort out the tangles made by the lazy knitters on earth. But the devil of it is, as Butler saw from the very beginning, that ninety-nine men out of a hundred have so often been told by the "authorities" that they are incapable of judging for themselves that they believe it, and so are really incapable. They have been befooled by this "insolence of official persons." We must change all that, says Butler, and so takes off his coat to the job of flaying theories right and left, of digging down to the bones of every popular conception, asking in *Life and Habit* of that catchword, "survival of the



fittest," Is it done by Luck or Cunning ; and asking, in *The Way of All Flesh*, What is the framework on which respectability is built ?

At bottom, of course, Butler is a man of prodigious faith, as well as of vast reverence. Heredity did not fail in him of all men, for although he derided the ancient forms of faith and reverence as these were served by those ancestors of his who filled "the Butlers' Pantry" in Kenilworth Church, yet he trusted as fully to his faith as a man trusts in his power to walk—when he walks. And is not *solvitur ambulando* a great confession of faith ? Butler, then, believed that there is no good thing at all unless a mind has designed it ; the universe of physical life was, on the whole, a good thing, although for the moment going through a bad time. Yet it was good, for it had produced Homer, Shakespeare, Handel and Giovanni Bellini ; it had caused even Paul to write the thirteenth chapter of the First Corinthians, that great psalm of the acceptance of life even in this provisional stage ; it had given birth to peasant and fisherman. For all these reasons, if for no others, one may contend that the created universe is good. But if so, then it is the work of a mind, of an intelligence, even if that intelligence has been, and still is, groping its way forward. You may know this vast thing, and judge it, as you would know and judge the merest fugue or picture, or piece of design of any kind—by the inevitability of the expression. Whatever God is, He must have this much of the artist about Him : He must be tracing, however instinctively, a design. This design is before you : it is the marvel of the ages and appears now, as it has always appeared, as clothed in flesh and glorified with light and colour without, and with the marvels of consciousness within. We must find the inner plan, the guiding thread in it, or be damned for fools, cries Butler, turning to take up the job neglected by all the guides ; by the high-priests of the Church as well as by the leaders of science.

This put him, of course, in opposition everywhere : he is the upstart, the amateur, in every department. He is the glove thrown down to the professor of every pretension in turn. No wonder they snarl, these professors, from Theodore Pontifex over the little matter of the unbaptised infants, to

Darwin in the business of "Luck or Cunning"! But, having once "been in opposition," Butler could not retire: it was not in him to do so. And so his last years are spent in harrying the sedate farmyard of the classical scholars over the authorship of the *Odyssey*, or in raiding the pen in which the academic critics are confined and bullying them to decide at what age Shakespeare wrote Sonnet 23, in order that we may be sure what is the precise design in passion that he traced therein, whether it be homo-sexual or otherwise. Butler, and the select company of Butlerites, enjoyed this campaign, but the victims of it most decidedly did not. For your average sensual man, while he is in the flesh, is not interested in his bones; in the same way, the average thinker, theologian, scientist, or critic, seldom bothers about design, either in God's works, or in man's. What he likes to do is to enjoy the flesh, the thing made, without making too many indecent inquiries. He feels, in fact, that to ask him to sit in his bones and to see nothing but bones all round him, as Butler does, is a horribly uncomfortable invitation, as well as an insulting one. It is hard to decide whether this chilly business is more displeasing to the theologian or to the scientist. Both thundered at Butler; the pious at the *Fair Haven*—when at last they understood what it was about; and the worshippers of the great god, Darwin, at *Life and Habit*, and its theory of memory as the thread of heredity and evolution. Ultimately, however, it was the scientists who paid Butler the compliment of swallowing his theory and doing it as silently and effectively as the amoeba when it closes its flesh round the nutrient it desires to absorb. The theologians have not as yet followed this example, at least over the Resurrection, though they are feeling the foundations shaking in the business of the Virgin Birth. Unfortunately Butler left nothing for them to swallow in that matter.

The importance of this one-pointed instinct of Butler's consists in the fact that it appeared on the stage of thought at the moment when the restlessness of men's hearts was driving them towards the solution which he could give them. His exact, forcible brain serves as the spearpoint of a conflict precisely because the idea that men hungered for vaguely he demanded insistently.

Thinking men were growing dissatisfied with an unintelligible universe, for what they needed was one in which they could see some reflection, however dim, of their own nature ; some reflection in which, though but as in a glass darkly, they could perceive order evolving out of chaos, an order comprehensible to the human reason and one not entirely hateful to the human heart. When, therefore, Darwin gave them a mechanism which was worked by loading the dice on the side of the strong, they accepted the theory because, after all, it brought order, however much its principles might outrage the heart. To the modern man of thought any order is better than none. Hence they were ready to burn incense before the law, because it was law. And so a great shout of joy arose when Tennyson sang of a perfect world to the tune of "æons hence," though, to be sure, it was a world in whose coming man could take no part but that of obedience ; an obedience quite as blind and senseless as any that had ever been paid to Church or King, to priest or medicine man. Against this satisfaction, this armour of reason, Butler brought to bear the only weapon he had ; his belief in the salutary process of verifying one's references. He had always believed in "a something as yet but darkly known which makes right right and wrong wrong" ; he also believed that what light one has one must follow without regard to any conventions, social, scientific, or religious. He sat down, then, to consider how we learn to do anything—to play an instrument, to write, to speak. He found that it is only when we do a thing unconsciously, when we have the habit of doing it, that we can really do it. When we sit down and introspectively "look within" to see how we do it, we halt and lose all facility. By the unconscious memory of an act or series of acts that has been repeated incessantly we have learnt all that we know ; and through us life has also learnt all that it knows, from the amœba up to man, or, earlier still, from the primordial cell. This chain of memory is continuous and connects the last parental cell with the first. Of "a conscious purpose running through the whole" he disclaims all knowledge ; the amœba did not foresee the man, "yet it is mainly through the foreseeing of the very little that organism can alone foresee at each point in its progress that the results we see have been brought about. Hence each step of the road



having been purposeful, the whole journey has been purposeful, though the purpose has been growing and varying all the time."

In these simple words is contained what the human reason, as well as the human heart, had been craving for so long—that right of attorney whereby man himself may become, in Butler's word, "purposeful" and take a hand openly and frankly in playing the game. For long enough reason has "looked before and after"; more and more every day it "pines for what is not," ye, being no lovesick girl, but a man, it longs to take the direction of life into its own hands, to trust to its own "cunning," and not to the "luck" of fortuitous circumstances.

Religiously speaking, when Butler reached this conception of "purpose," he crossed the Great Divide. For what had really agitated the minds of the nineteenth century was not whether there is a God, but whether the God that is must be conceived as working within the creation, or without it. And the insane folly of the Church lay in the fact that it could not even see where the crux of the question was. The anthropomorphic God Without was gone, He who, having made men, was so angry with what He had made that He had to be appeased with a scapegoat. He was never more than a child's image. When He was gone, vanished like a mist before the sun, man could not bear an empty heaven, and so hugged contentedly for a time that bogey supplied by the first Darwinites, "the survival of the fittest" through the arbitrament of lucky chance. Beside this hypothesis Butler's thread of purpose is indeed divine, whether it is regarded as a history of the past or a prophecy of the future. This thin, unbreakable thread of memory, that awakes to consciousness whenever it encounters in the present a set of circumstances which are a repetition of what it has encountered in the past, works alike when the child sucks, when the chick shapes a beak, the musician repeats a movement, and the thinker reacts strongly to some stimulus of idea that was feebly given in germ perhaps ages ago. Every new need awakes fresh effort to satisfy it. There is, in one sense, neither death nor life, only continuous change from one state of being to another. And the personality of the most complex creature ever evolved is but a slight enrichment



of the stupendous personality that is coming into being down through the ages.

Butler had a saying that "an honest God's the noblest work of man." He here presents us, then, with his idea of such a being. It is perhaps the God of humanity's youth, as the God who wanted "atonement" is the God of childhood. And before the God of our maturity Butler's may be a "poor thing." Yet it will evidently serve for this particular stage of the evolution of the race, for one cannot ask more of any conception of the Unknowable but that it should satisfy a felt need.

It is curious to observe, in Butler's own life, how his career was built up consistently on this idea of a purposefulness that works "little by little," and sees only a hand-breadth in front of it. It was a Russian lady who, after listening to his confidences, remarked to him: "Et maintenant, Monsieur, vous allez créer." It was at first a puzzle to him, that saying, for he did not yet realise that "doing is the sole parent of doing, and creating a little the only way of learning to create more." Yet it is, according to him, in just this way that the Life Force has travelled from the amoeba to man. Truly a tremendous principle, this same "little by little." Butler when he was young felt that the question of whether Christ was the Son of God would lead him into "paths which human intelligence cannot tread"; yet before the end he is found planning the scheme by which is shown, not Christ's sonship alone, but the sonship of every creature, small and great. You can, too, manage to put the argument for the theory in sixty words, according to the famous recipe for testing whether you have a good plot or not. And surely Butler's plot is the biggest one in the world, since it successfully tackles the Days of Creation. It is solid, too, solid enough to satisfy that boy who was much disgusted when he found that a woman's petticoats were not all solid woman, through and through. Butler was one of those who would not trust himself to dive into the depths or to float on to the cloudy heights without his guiding thread of purpose.

But is it really true that this theory of the unity of consciousness through the thread of inherited memory covers everything that appears in the history of man? Butler's

theory, of course, includes two suppositions : first, that need calls forth the power to supply what is required, first in simple needs and then in more complex ones ; and, second, that when memory awakes at the suggestion of events like those through which it has passed many times, the creature knows what to do in an instant. The reaction is as sudden as that of anger to a blow. This explains, of course, the slowness of all change ; it shows, too, that if we rely on instinct alone, and deny reason, we must move for ever in a circle, and not even in a spiral upward course.

But this is not the end of the difficulty involved in this theory, since the very thread on which all this is carried is, according to Butler, spun simply of the turning-wheel of fleshly incarnation. The parent-cells carry all this freight of meaning. But, if this is true, on what thread of memory did Goethe spin his vision of the many planes of consciousness that meet, according to him, in man ? Or, to put it another way, when and how was the first thread spun of that consciousness which leaps to such rich and confusing life in *Faust* ? Or what memory of sinister life did Leonardo touch when he painted that smile of his sinister women ? Or what first stirring of the Will in bygone creatures did Dostoevsky recall when, in the phrase of Mr. Middleton Murry, he brought his timeless figures down to this world of time ? For time is the very essence of Butler's conception, and this thread of memory cannot be spun on any wheel but that of the ages.

We have seen how Butler solved the question of the existence of the men whom he called the Seven Humbugs of the World : he cut them out, preferring to follow simply the adventures of Adam and Eve in the garden of this world. It was, he felt, " disorderly " to meddle with anything outside that garden.

Yet even Butler did not really leave the matter there, where he seems to leave it. In a curious passage on what he entitles " The Super-Organic Kingdom " he says : " As the solid inorganic kingdom supervened upon the gaseous . . . and as the organic Supervened upon the inorganic . . . so a third kingdom is now in process of development, the super-organic, of which we see the germs in the less practical and more emotional side of our nature.

“Man, for example, is the only creature that interests himself in his own past, or forecasts the future to any considerable extent. This tendency I would see as the monad of the new régime—a régime that will be no more governed by the ideas and habits now prevailing among ourselves than we are by those still prevailing among stones and water.”

Here, then, is that third kingdom which Ibsen also foresaw, though in him it assumed the guise of a final reconciliation of individualism and collectivism; when the man is at last one with the whole. It is apparently foreseen by Paul in his phrase “face to face”; it is apparently a new consciousness, even a new state of matter.

Here, then, we are forced to the question, even by Butler himself, Is it not probable that those whom Butler stoned, those Great Masters of the terrible visions, had already lived, momentarily at least, in this Third Kingdom, and had caught glimpses once or twice of the timeless world? Perhaps, indeed, if we may still hold to Butler’s thread of memory, these are they who had tapped the storehouses, not of the memory of the cell’s experiences, but of what was buried in the heart of the Divine Darkness before ever the primordial cell came into being; what may, in fact, have been hidden in the unevolved memory of the primordial cell itself. It is not more difficult to conceive this than it is to believe, as Butler did, that “every molecule of matter is full of will and conscious.”

Shakespeare and Homer are Butler’s poets because both these men saw human beings in imagination as Butler himself would like to have seen them in the flesh, walking the earth, that is, with swinging muscles, with zestful and untroubled brains and with a fine, strong, amorous nobility that recked nothing of the mean social virtues; men and women not suffering from that disease of thought which makes us all so ugly. Hamlet alone is a “throw-forward” into the bad new times, but what Butler made of him it is hard to say.

Homer’s men and Shakespeare’s! if there had been no other record than theirs of that two-legged animal, man, what a splendid figure the race would have cut in the celestial records! But Butler, having been born during one of the periods when the Life Force was in particularly heavy travail,



was driven, willy-nilly, into the lying-in room and Homer and Shakespeare were therefore but holiday companions.

Meanwhile he struggled with the hosts of Darwin, grew to regard an open window with suspicion and loved neither pard nor panther, but a cat. He had three women in his life, Madame, the *demi-mondaine* whom he visited for twenty years, and whom after the lapse of fifteen he found sufficiently discreet to—invite to tea at his rooms; the beautiful Isabella of Arona; and, finally, Miss Savage, with the barbed wit of a clever woman of the world and a steady determination, where *The Way of All Flesh* was concerned—that he should write it. Did she not also say, “Blessed are they that mourn, for crape bonnets are the cheapest”? and do we not love her for that, as well as for much other verbal finery? She paints priceless pictures of Butler, once showing him in Berners Street, eating cherries out of a basket and silently offering them to her as she passed, but then—she also worked kettle-holders for him and tried to surround him with the whole atmosphere of feminine fuss. This brave woman, with her plain face and diseased body, who chattered to Butler when she had tooth-ache, but went away silently to die of cancer, was pitched in one way too high and in the other too low for him. She took no real interest in the work of his brain when that dealt with the creative force, but she yet kept his nose to the grindstone of novel-writing, because she was a good critic, though not much of a thinker. Anyway, Butler got from her exactly what Mahomet got from his old wife; that is, belief. And Mahomet paid the price for his article, but Samuel did not. Miss Savage’s elaborate pleasantries were boring enough when they came from another street; he would have died of them in the same house.

But the three women, the body, soul, and spirit, of Butler’s emotional life, are symbols of that house divided against itself which we call modern life. Man, Agonistes, is barren, being too old for the simple loveliness of Isabella, the Italian innkeeper’s daughter, too subtle to find in a “Madame” all that he wanted of a woman, and too much in love with beauty and health to find satisfaction in a city-made, city-spoilt woman. Butler was not turned into a satirist simply because he was tossed out of English society by his quarrel with the Church;



the irony of his loneliness cut deeper still. He, a lover of active life, but forced into the life of thought, was driven to employ a man-servant simply in order to get something young about the place ; he kept a series of cats and was childless, except for the interest he took in " Alfred's " seven-month baby about whose birth he jests with the joy of a Rabelaisian old maid. In that he wrote he was indeed damned ; damned out of the joyful life of birth and generation.

*The Way of All Flesh* is an epic because the source of its inspiration is the life of the bygone centuries of English life. In *Tom Jones* is the rough and tumble of English country life ; in Butler's masterpiece there is to be found the acrid tang given by the taste of the English soul. This effect is produced by the three characters, Christina, Theobald and Mrs. Jupp ; in the first there is incarnated that sentimental idealism which makes an Englishman the greatest preaching and converting animal that the world has ever known ; in Theobald is the joy felt by your true-born Englishman when he has another creature in his grip, under his hand, not as a sheep before his shearer, but as a soft lump to be moulded ; in Mrs. Jupp is our saving virtue, good humour, broad, jolly and earthy, that " gets along with people " and suffers everybody gladly—except the Theobalds and Christinas. Jupp, in fact, is the sole medicine we possess for driving out earnestness and tyranny : it is the healthy onion in the English salad-bowl.

Irony has been called " justice in a mocking humour," but this is not Butler's brand of the thing by any means. Justice is a very active creature who carries a sword and stands about in market-places, because she would like to do us good. To all that Butler opposes his great saying—" *surtout point de zèle.*" I have no desire to make anybody better ; I leave that to—Theobald and Christina who spent their lives in this thoroughly English pursuit. I just show you what a figure people cut when they go in for this kind of thing. It was *zèle* that led to Christina's exquisite maunderings, and a fiercer spirit of the same kind that made Theobald fasten his fangs in the soft flesh of his son.

The characterisation of *The Way of All Flesh* is wrought with hammer-strokes, but it is not the solidity of Theobald, Christina and Mrs. Jupp that accounts for the overwhelming

impression they produce. They are more than what they seem, and just as Giorgione's *Concert* gives us, not merely three faces, but the ripples of sound, the waves of living joy, that move across the air in that picture, so Theobald, Christina and Jupp stand amid a whirling flood of laughter. These three are immortal because they breathe an air that is burnt clean of earthy dross, that is the quintessence of mockery. Christina is not merely a woman who, like millions of other Englishwomen, gives "sofa-talks" on piety to her son, she is created of every foolish woman's best. Theobald waving that last will and testament of his is the coming into literature of the age-long struggle between the old man and his male offspring in the tree, the cave and the villa. A deal of ink has been spilt in writing about life seen *sub specie æternitatis*, but here is the eternal laughter at the human plight. The bemused but kindly Englishman, who is convinced that God has given him the key to a better world than any conceived by his neighbours, can here see himself in a glass, but not darkly. It would be instructive if we could only be told how many copies of *The Way of All Flesh* have been burnt, not by the hands of the common hangman, but by the hands of the common father and mother. For by spontaneous generation parentage is commonly supposed to breed haloes. And this book is just a tremendous plucking of haloes. For the last enemy to be overthrown is sanctimoniousness, and, just because Butler was filled to the brim with reverence for the greatness of the fate to which we are called, he was able to send the echoes flying in laughter at the "genteel paroxysms of admiration" which attacked Mr. George Pontifex in the Uffizi Gallery and at the spectacle which he recorded in his own picture called *Family Prayers* where a set of graven images sit, all silent and obviously all damned, while God's representative on earth, the vicar, reads from a big book.

Butler called down the comic spirit to brood over his ancestral rectory, but, as if to make amends to the manes of his offended ancestors, he devoted painstaking months to a life of his grandfather, Dr. Butler, of Shrewsbury School. This he did, apparently, largely because he liked the old man—and saw himself in him. This *Life of Dr. Butler* was a sop to Nemesis, like that habit Ernest had, in *The Way of All Flesh*,

of taking the sacrament once a year. For "*surtout point de zèle*" is the last word in *The Way*, as it is in Butler's view of creation. For the Vast Being, of whom we each form an infinitesimal part, has always known what the next step is to be. We, the cells, need not therefore greatly perturb ourselves, nor force anything on others, lest we be cast away and become a Theobald, a Christina. Let us, then, take our sacrament, with Ernest, once a year, remembering that Thirteenth Chapter of the First Corinthians, and the fate of prophecies, tongues and knowledge. These things may be safely held in derision, for they surely fade away. As far as we can see the great Design, there is but one thing that is immortal in it; it is the thing that was realised even by "unlovely Paul": it is grace.

## CHAPTER II

### DOSTOEVSKY

ONE could probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of works of criticism that are creative in the sense of carrying with them a power of vital suggestion. Yet the strange fact is that no less than two of these are written on Dostoevsky; one by a man of eastern Europe, by Dmitri Merejkowski, and the other by J. Middleton Murry, a man of the West. These works are like searchlights that, while they move across the dark landscape of Dostoevsky's soul, also illumine the inner recesses of one's own mind. For what Dostoevsky did was to extend enormously our conception of the limits of personality, and therefore by interpreting him, these two critics also interpret each one of us. And when Dostoevsky wrote from prison, asking for Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel's *History of Philosophy*, he knew what he was about, as he added the extraordinary words, "my whole future depends upon that." He was then consciously preparing for his life-work, the work of incarnating in great type-forms the men who are to be.

For centuries philosophers and mystics, Kant and Hegel, Jacob Böehme and St. John of the Cross, had been exploring, on the one hand the realms of abstract thought, on the other the world of transcendental experience. They had written on these things, the philosophers describing and analysing the processes of absolute thought, the seers the experiences of ecstatic vision. But both philosophers and seers were like athletes who practise for the race-course rather than for the toil of everyday life. What Dostoevsky had to do was to take up the matter where the saints and thinkers had left it, and to show how men would come down from these transcendental worlds to express in the flesh a life of thought and feeling



which had hitherto been explored only mentally by the experts of the study and the cell.

Only a man of the Eastern type of mind could have attempted such a task ; only a man, too, who had endured in his own body and soul all the terrors of life and death. For a man of the West, where everything both without and within turns on the idea of success, on accomplishment, could not be sufficiently disinterested, sufficiently free from the notion of an end to be attained, even to breathe the air of these new worlds. Nietzsche said that Dostoevsky was the only psychologist who could teach him anything ; he might have gone further and confessed that only Dostoevsky could make clear to the understanding that world beyond Good and Evil which Nietzsche spent his life in trying to explain. It was Nietzsche who reached that region by the pure gymnastic of thought, but Dostoevsky carried the beating heart of a man into it.

In the ordinary sense of the word Dostoevsky's books have no plot at all ; we realise at the start that there is nothing to be " worked out," accomplished, in act ; nothing to be gained, no problem to be solved. Always in the West we " test," even if it be merely by an inner sense of satisfaction. What we want in a novel is some assurance of method and order, an assurance which we fail to find in experience. But there is no " test " at all in Dostoevsky ; only, at first sight, an interminable series of scenes where people talk, almost always in a frenzy of excitement, pouring out folly, wisdom, kindness, cruelty ; all the secrets of their hearts, in fact. For Dostoevsky knew, if ever a man did, what was in man. These people of his are all talking, and, it would seem, also all damned. It is bewildering as a spectacle when it is not boring. Then at last, if we persist, we feel ourselves carried away by a torrent of feeling like nothing we have ever experienced before. The sensation is almost as if we had been insulted ; we feel we are being treated most disrespectfully, for our plumes are ruffled and our propriety is outraged. At first we cry, " If only they would stop talking." And next it is, " If only they would stop living." For they do live, these people of Dostoevsky's creation ; they are alive, even bursting with life.

Dostoevsky has almost every power at his command ; he has humour, a power of wringing the heart with pity, he can

show—most terrible gift of all—the saddhistic vileness of the cruelty that persists through pity and horror. Most good people will not acknowledge the existence of this spirit ; but if they persist in denying it, then Dostoevsky, and with it the “ Russian heart,” must remain a closed book as far as they are concerned. Dostoevsky’s humour is supposed by some to be non-existent ; but what shall be said, then, of the twenty years of love between Stepan Trofinovitch and his protectress, Varvara Petrovna ? Is he not a vastly absurd creature with his posing as a dangerous revolutionary, with his idleness and vanity—and his attacks of “ summer cholera ” ? Yet when his lady, Varvara, says to him when he lies dying, “ You scented yourself for Dasha,” we do not laugh because we want to cry.

Stepan and Varvara are both grotesques, and how great is Dostoevsky’s life-giving power as an artist we shall see at once if we compare his grotesques with those of Dickens. The Englishman is not unkind to these figures of fun, but he is amused because he is a looker-on. But Dostoevsky, as a realist, is himself implicated in the grotesquerie of his people, because he is implicated in every single element of their nature. He is indeed a supreme realist because he is incapable of a merely superficial observation of a human creature. They are blood of his blood, brain of his brain. And the range of his humanity is practically endless, covering every kind of character that can appear in the human form. There is the idiot-cripple whom Stavrogin marries in *The Possessed* ; there are scores of drunkards whose souls are as open to Dostoevsky’s gaze as those of the most righteous men ; there are prigs and men of the world and men of the other world ; there are managing women and shrews who rage and ramp over somebody’s love-affairs and somebody’s lost umbrella indifferently ; there are bouncing girls, like the Epanchin sisters, and girls whose purity is truly like a “ light ” ; there are cynical beasts such as that most complete villain, Prince Valkovsky, who had nevertheless mastered the secret of life—that “ what isn’t nonsense is personality—myself. All is for me ; the whole world is created for me ” ; there are sufferers by the hundred, and rebels ; there are child-men, like Alyosha in *Insulted and Injured*, who is perhaps the final triumph of portraiture in all

this gallery ; there are children old in knowledge of all that is unspeakably vile, such as Nellie in the same story ; there are, in addition, Spirits of the Flesh, of the old-world and ancient Darkness, and Spirits that come from Above and Below.

For the little lighted world where these talking people move and strive is surrounded by a region, full of power, full of all strangeness, a formless, timeless world. This region is the land of the Absolute. And between it and our world Dostoevsky set out to build a bridge of flesh. That mock-heroic description of the Second Part of *Faust* in *The Possessed* is an apt enough summary of the contents of Dostoevsky's own portrait gallery : " the scene opens with a chorus of women, followed by a chorus of men, then a chorus of incorporeal powers of some sort, and at the end of all a chorus of Spirits not yet living, but very eager to come to life."

It is these Spirits " very eager to come to life " that are the corner-stone on which the whole structure of Dostoevsky's work is built. And these, too, commonly share the fate of that other corner-stone, inasmuch as they are usually rejected. But, if one gazes long enough at the heaving mass of human creatures who pour out their secrets before one in Dostoevsky's books, one realises, even through the chatter of the monkey-house, the presence of certain characters who—do not explain themselves. They are strange, enigmatic, often sinister. Their way, too, has been prepared for them, even before they actually come on the scene. Some shadow of their power has been cast before them, so that even the monkey-house is alert against their appearance. Thus Raskolnikoff dreams, and when Svidrigailoff stands in the room, the student is uncertain whether the man is a part of the dream or not. Before Stavrogin in *The Possessed* is actually seen in the flesh, legends of abnormal passions and vices have spread in front of him so that at his first appearance we are almost surprised to find him so much like other people. Then we see the strangeness of his face that is like a mask and the disturbing effect he produces notwithstanding the efforts of his friend, Pyotr, to explain him. At last, through the shape he has impressed on his three disciples, we begin to perceive him as something abnormal, but something which lends a meaning to the whole



monkey-house. For from Stavrogin, as from Svidrigailoff in *Crime and Punishment*, there stretch curious threads of influence which bind this chattering crowd of futilities to something that is not of this earth. And Lisa is not the only person to feel about Stavrogin that he has something awful, loathsome, some bloodshed—on his conscience, and—yet something which would make him ridiculous. The scenes of the story at which we have been gazing begin to form a clear picture, as though the milkiness in the crystal were clearing before us.

There is something shocking in the revelation, for the acts by which these master-figures betray the strangeness of their origin are trivial, indecent and grotesque; they are mocking travesties of the great Will that speaks through them. Stavrogin is portentous to his disciples and to us, but what he does is to pull the nose of a respectable citizen and to bite the Governor's ear: these are the exploits of his earlier days, and later on, when the most tremendous issues are being decided in his soul, all he does is to refuse to strike back at the "sodden" thud of Shatov's blow on his face. He finally hangs himself by a rope he has soaped. And even inwardly, in the mental world, the case is no more dignified, for the three men he has inspired have no understanding at all of the thing Stavrogin now stands for: of these, one is crushed by the single idea he has understood; the second is a child who wanders among the toys which he calls "God"; and the third makes a caricature of what he has heard, and turns Stavrogin into that legendary figure of Russian superstition, Ivan the Tsarevitch, who shall rule like a despot over a new Russia.

These are tawdry results. But even more terrifying is the failure of Myshkin in the last terrible scene in *The Idiot*, where the Prince, himself now utterly broken in mind, can do nothing to help the madman except stroke his face. The Prince's love was boundless since it had its depths in the eternal world, but it cannot be brought down to earth. There is no bridge between the region of the Absolute and that of flesh and blood. These beings, Stavrogin, Svidrigailoff and Myshkin, who come down from the timeless world, as Mr. Middleton Murry puts it, to the world of time, have to suffer the supreme ignominy which every creature that is immortal must suffer when it puts on mortality and tries to express on this plane the things



which belong to another ; Myshkin is lost, broken, by the ordeal beyond mere death to which he had been subjected in the dark house of the flesh. The other two find nothing to do but to die. The compassion of Myshkin, the Will of Stavrogin and Svidrigailoff, are alike helpless before the dark strength of the earth. Yet, none the less, these men are the magnets which test the quality of every creature they meet ; they are, too, the beings in whom Dostoevsky expressed the stupendous effort he was making in the creative world, in the world of personality. These are the characters who are trying to scale the " wall " that lies right across humanity's road.

This " wall " which he describes in *Letters from the Under-world*, and to which he recurs again and again, is the great dilemma of the ultimate Will. Kirillov puts it plainly in *The Possessed*. He says : " If there is no God, then I am God. . . . If God exists, all is His will, and from His will I cannot escape. If not, it's all my will, and I am bound to show my self-will."

" Self-will ? But why are you bound ? "

" Because all will has become mine."

These two men, Stavrogin and Svidrigailoff, are on the horns of this dilemma. It is Hardy's problem of the Immanent Will over again, when it comes face to face with that in the created thing which criticises the Creator. Here are minds which, while subject to Nature's laws through the body which they inhabit, are yet masters of these laws because they face them.

In this dilemma, and faced with the fact that Nature's laws work by pain, Hardy sees nothing for it but to wait. Dostoevsky sees, in the same case, nothing for it but rebellion. Both Svidrigailoff and Stavrogin set out to discover which is the stronger, the Will behind life, or the Will within their personalities. And the irony of the situation is that both would give everything they are if only they could get the faintest answer from the Will which they have set themselves to oppose. That is their tragedy, for in Browning's phrase in *Porphyria's Lover*, " God has not said a word " ; God never says a word, not even a word of love through the lips of a woman.

It is this drama of the immortal world that Dostoevsky is bringing down to earth to be acted on the stage of these

common people's lives, these people who surround his great protagonists.

But how did Dostoevsky come to feel life as he does? How did he ever reach this world where Will is all that exists? How did he ever conceive of the possibility of created and Creator facing the matter out in this inconceivable fashion? For all men up to this point have but trained their wills on small things, on mere schoolboy tests.

He did these incredible things, first and foremost, because the current of human thought was, and had been, flowing towards just this rapid for many years; second, he was the man appointed, the chosen one, because he had come to the gulf of death, had looked over the edge and returned; and third, because he was a Russian with the secret of Asia in his heart and the energy of the West in his brain.

It is said that Dostoevsky is still the most widely read writer in his own country and that he is recognised by the Russians themselves as the man who most truly understood their national character. No English reader can possibly judge the truth, or falsehood, of this statement, but, at any rate, the spirit that is revealed in Dostoevsky is one that startles and electrifies, perhaps even horrifies.

For the creatures of this Russian brain tell us things about themselves that most Englishmen, most men of the West, never acknowledge to themselves openly. They tell us—that they feel and are not ashamed of feeling. These people can kill, rob, steal, rape and backbite; they can descend to the lowest depth of meanness, cowardice and debauchery, but they never cease to feel; they seldom, if ever, cease to analyse their feelings. They feel love and pity, even in the most loathsome circumstances. Filthy, they can yet feel purity; blackened, they can yet see the light. Sinning, they sense through every writhing, tortured nerve the sublime part that sin has yet to play in the drama of human existence.

This fact is one part of that terrible story, *The Idiot*. Nastasia cannot accept the healing which the Prince offers her, not merely because she is too proud to endure pity, but mainly because she is nailed to her cross; she is a great symbol of the lost innocence of the whole world.

For this fact is of all things most amazing in Dostoevsky:

that the creatures of his brain are taking part in a world-drama. No other writer comes anywhere near this, except the writers of the Gospels. And Nastasia never ceases to feel the nails of her cross, and through all the scenes where smooth men sell her politely, and rough men bid for her like savages, the fire of her agony rises higher and higher under the mask of shamelessness. At least, that is what Myshkin sees and the reader sees with him. Again, throughout *Insulted and Injured*, from the first pages where the old man and his beloved dog, *Azorka*, come out to die, an extraordinary glow of loving-kindness persists, with a willingness to share the pain and joy of life as though all were indeed one. These people keep nothing back from each other, neither food nor the most precious feelings of their hearts.

It was in such a world that Dostoevsky set his great protagonists of the Will ; it was out of such a world of feeling that he plucked the inspiration which made him create universal human types ; types, that is, which embody the tragic soul of all the human story. He could never have breathed spiritual life into a set of people who were sealed from this intimacy of life and feeling, who could not swim in one common sea of passion and compassion.

For if the sense of unity is ever coming to be a matter, not of the intellect, but of the nerves, it will first come, one must suppose, in a society where men openly show the sources of that which makes them glad and sorry. It is said that sensitives can feel, without word or look, the influences from others that reach their own atmosphere ; in Dostoevsky's books, if anywhere in literature, we feel as though we were in a crowd, every one of whom is bombarding us with unconscious appeal. It is even a nerve-shattering experience.

Such was the kind of human material which Fate appears to have prepared for Dostoevsky. Then he was plunged into suffering. From the beginning he knew poverty and the shame of it, being born, aptly enough, in a workhouse institution where his father was the doctor. He was sentenced and went out to die, being reprieved, but only after he had drunk to the full in his mind the cup of death's agony ; he suffered the enforced loneliness of prison ; he had epileptic fit after epileptic fit, during which, in the moment before he fell, he



tasted of that other—consciousness of life and being which seems to be a foretaste of a new light which shall be for all mankind.

So he realised the pain of the world, the pain that is the law of life. He caught, in those moments before the fit threw him, what may be the light of the new world for all men. He gambled ; he went into the Underworld of the city, as well as into that dark hell where the Will crawls like a worm and yet faces its destiny like a god.

Down in this Hell Dostoevsky found Christ, and found Him so fully that it made him deny the existence of God. It is strange, indeed, to think of what the orthodox mean by "finding Christ," and to see what it meant to Dostoevsky to "find" Him. For the fact of the sufferings of Christ, which the pious regard with satisfaction, even to the extent of gloating over the physical details, was to this man the very reason why he could not believe that God, the Will Behind, was good, or could be good. The orthodox man is, of course, thinking of himself and enjoying the mean gratification of seeing somebody else pay his debts for him ; and that Somebody the purest and most beautiful Being ever born. But Dostoevsky, who had a better opportunity of knowing what the passion of Christ must actually have meant, was so possessed by the thought of it that he saw only the Passion, and the purity of the Being who so suffered. In that sinister house of Parfen Rogojin, which was full of the dark smouldering fire of the flesh and its passions, there was a picture that would "make an unbeliever" ; it was a picture of what the corpse of a man looks like after he has been crucified.

It is curious, is it not, that of all the millions who have looked on such a picture of Christ, none but Dostoevsky has been made an "unbeliever" by the sight ? Or if there are others, their story is not recorded.

To Dostoevsky it seemed, quite simply, that there could be no Will to Good in the universe if that Will could drag through such tortures the Being who was so inconceivably beautiful that it is hard to see how He was produced. And if there was no Will to Good, then there was no God, though there might, of course, be a Will to Evil, a Will more cruel than any man. And then Dostoevsky "takes his side." He



says: "I believe that there is nothing lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic, more rational, more human and more perfect than the Saviour; I say to myself that not only is there no one else like Him, but that there could be no one. I would say even more: if anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with the truth."

Christ is to Dostoevsky the man-god, a perfect man, the firstfruits of humanity's long travail of ages, but not the God-man. And then, being tortured by the idea of God, Dostoevsky sets out into the world of the Absolute, of Absolute thought, to find a Will in the darkness, something other than the silence, than the mockery which is presented to the soul when it faces the suffering of the world and is told that—all tears shall be wiped away.

For this is no answer at all to the man who feels that, as long as one creature has endured torment, he at least has no desire to enjoy the bliss which has been bought by that creature's pain. In the vast world of thought and feeling that forms the background of Dostoevsky's figures, there is always to be found this question, this conflict: how to find a Will behind the show that is not purely evil, that is beyond Good and Evil; or, if this is impossible, how to bring into existence, through man, a Will that shall be able to put all things under its feet; to whose sweep and scope of free power there shall be no limit, no boundary at all.

This, of course, brings him to the Will as it is in man. For since the Will that brought creation into being brought pain and suffering that is inconceivable, unimaginable, in its mass and depth, there is no support anywhere in the universe except in man himself.

Once, and once only, the Will of man has manifested itself in tremendous power and beauty; that was in Christ. In Him there was no limit to self-abnegation, to utter giving up of everything. In the cry "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" there is the last surrender, even to the extinction of the self.

But there is obviously another way by which the Will of a man may put all things under its feet: that is by the Will to supreme expression; to do all things; to defy the holding

power of every instinct, however age-long and deep it may be ; to outrage common sense and the spirit that fears the ridiculous, the obscene ; to assert the personality to such a degree that at the end there is nothing anywhere that is stronger than itself ; until it is a pure Will which acts as freely as that which moves in the void and therefore suffers no resistance, no lethargy or retardation. A Will such as this may do good ; it may do evil ; but to it good or evil are indifferent, since it has reached a region beyond such considerations, which belong to the realm of law.

This is the form of Will which, as Mr. Middleton Murry shows, comes down to earth in the forms of Stavrogin in *The Possessed* and in Svidrigailoff in *Crime and Punishment*. There is no act at all, either noble or horrible, that is outside the scope of these men. Svidrigailoff saves the innocent and helpless from want, but not because these things are good deeds ; he does them with a cold freakishness that is even more disturbing than his vile deeds—his persecution of Dounia, his vampire pursuit of girls and women. Svidrigailoff is a haunted man, haunted by the one last fear of all such men of Will, and haunted, too, by the last faint hope which plays like a will-o'-the-wisp before their longing eyes, the hope that there is in the darkness Something—which answers ; the fear that this Something is only obscene, the fear that at the heart of life is—a spider ; that the timeless world, the vast realm of the Absolute, may be but—a bath-house, not a temple. It is to solve this doubt, or to put himself in the way of solving it, that he goes out on his “ journey,” going, too, under all the circumstances of squalor that can be devised. The child in his dream, the drenched and crying image of misery, whom he wraps in his blankets, is life ; and sorrowful and pitiful beyond all telling. But when she leers up at him with the face of a harlot, then he sees nothing but the “ bath-house ” of eternity once more. Is this the secret of life : that there is no inside to it at all but—harlotry ? He goes out in order to see, and goes under the eyes of a policeman who wishes to move him on. When Dounia threw away the pistol with which she had tried to shoot him, he thought perhaps that God might be speaking in her love. But at her reply to his question : “ Can you love me ? ” he knew there was nothing to answer.

There is no thunder and no small voice from out of the darkness.

Stavrogin works on two planes of existence: on the one where Svidrigailoff had worked and failed, on the plane of action; and on the other, on the plane of men's minds. First, he set himself to the task of rising above those repressions in the consciousness which have made social life possible to man, which have tamed him. There are two great fears by which this repression has been attained: first, the fear of ridicule, and second, the horror of certain unsocial acts which has been produced by ages of law and of what is called conscience. Above these repressions Stavrogin would rise; but he can find only undignified expedients: he tweaks the ear of a man of propriety, he bites the ear of a dignitary; he marries an absurd creature.

The spectators are divided between two ideas about him; they think he must be either mad or a great hero. He is "vampire Stavrogin" and lives in the odour of crime and horror. He, too, however, dreams once that in a woman's love for him there might be some sign from the great Will in whose face he is flying. But even this longing cannot prevent him from defying his instincts—and ruining the woman who gives herself to him. Then he is truly alone in the desert. He is what no one else is; he is—himself; he is pure Will.

In the plane of the mind he has failed; for of his three disciples, Shatov, Kirillov and Pyotr Verhovensky, each one has become but a shadow of himself; and each is an absurd shadow. Shatov is petrified by the idea that has been presented to him; Kirillov is playing with the idea of a God and a heaven he can neither believe in nor abandon; Pyotr, with his quintets of destruction, is a brutal caricature of what Stavrogin stands for.

Of Shatov, Dostoevsky says: "He was one of those idealistic beings common in Russia, who are suddenly struck by some overmastering idea which seems, as it were, to crush them at once and sometimes for ever." Shatov's idea is that the Russian people, being the only "god-bearing" people on earth, will incarnate God on earth and so bring an end to the misery of existence.

For the strange fact is that all the disciples of Dostoevsky's



Men of Will are not seeking merely how man can incarnate the Will of a god; they are also seeking to solve the final problem of existence—that birth of universal harmony by which the travail of the ages shall be justified. And if the whole truth be told, this, too, is the divine consummation which the Men of Will, the protagonists of absolute rebellion, are also seeking. God never answers them, whatever fire scorches them, whatever sun shines on them, whether hate burns or love blesses. There is no Will, they cry. Then, say they, we will create one in ourselves; and to do that we will find no horror that is unthinkable, as the Men of Will of another sort, the Idiots, who give all, found no suffering that was unbearable.

Yet their goal is still the final harmony, the new consciousness that shall perceive it. And for all their superhuman stature, these men are like ourselves: they crave an End. They may talk, like Ivan Karamazov, of the suffering which has been, and is, the law of existence; they may talk of respectfully returning their "entrance-ticket" to the great final show which God may be preparing for His creatures; they may bar the door, in their passion of rage, between themselves and Paradise, but it is only the mind of the body that argues so, the mind in the fire of its passing torment. And even these timeless men of Dostoevsky do still hope. Or they did once, as the thoughts of their disciples prove.

It is only when Stavrogin feels the Silence all round him, when he really is sure that nothing answers, when, too, the very last enemy is killed within him, his self-satisfaction, that "the light in his eyes seemed to go out," and he was really alone, a Will and nothing else. To the Will that has reached that stage there is nothing at all in existence, neither harmony nor disharmony. Stavrogin's death, by that soaped rope, is different in spirit from Svidrigailoff's, for he went on his journey in order to find out what there was there, but Stavrogin goes—because there is nothing. He would have been glad even of a spider or a bath-house.

But Shatov, Stavrogin's follower, has a great deal left. He is crushed under the ideal of the national God who is to find His being in the people, yet when his wife comes back to him, he is for a few hours alive, his own man; he is a



personality such as he has never been during all the years when he crept about in Stavrogin's shadow. There is an extraordinary glow of love and beauty throughout those chapters in *The Possessed* which describe how Shatov served his wife; a great power of happy laughter, of the laughter that comes from love and is like nothing else on earth.

Kirillov, the second disciple, is a spirit of another sort. He is a childlike seer into whose lips Dostoevsky has put an expression of his own hope; his belief in the coming of a change in the consciousness of man whereby there shall be, in man's mind, no more time; no more becoming, no more unfolding, but a divine Now. This is the mystic background of Dostoevsky's soul; he expresses it plainly in Kirillov, but it appears fantastically in the tramp, Fedka, the figure of the underworld who is prepared to do Stavrogin's dirty work for him, not recognising that super-men do not require under-studies and that only aristocrats employ assassins. Fedka chatters about this Second Advent, and the drunkard Lebedev reads the Apocalypse for five years. For Dostoevsky is not one of those people whose ideas are too sacred to be played with.

Kirillov speaks like a child of what he believes, but when he has finished Stavrogin says nothing except, "That'll scarcely be possible in our time." He spoke, however, not scoffingly, but dreamily.

We would give a good deal to know what Stavrogin felt while Kirillov was going through the articles of his strange creed. We are not told, however; nor do we know whether Stavrogin saw himself, who had embarked on the supreme adventure of the Will, as a stepping-stone to the final harmony which Kirillov describes.

His creed runs thus:—

"When all mankind attains happiness then there will be no more time, for there'll be no need of it, a very true thought.

"Time's not an object, but an idea. It will be extinguished in the mind.

"It's all good, all. It's good for all those who know that it's all good. If they knew that it was good for them, it would be good for them, but as long as they don't know it's good for them, it will be bad for them.

"They're bad, because they don't know they're good.

“They’ll find out that they’re good and then they’ll all become good, every one of them.”

It is in this last formula that Kirillov expresses one of the fundamental principles of modern psychology.

But there is a short dialogue which expresses the creed of Dostoevsky himself :—

KIRILLOV.—He who teaches that all are good will end the world.

STAVROGIN.—He who taught it was crucified.

KIRILLOV.—He will come and His name will be the man-god.

STAVROGIN.—The god-man ?

KIRILLOV.—The man-god. That’s the difference.

It was towards the coming of this man-god that all Dostoevsky’s creative work was aimed. With this object in view he paints the common stuff of humanity as it is to-day ; he puts down its madness, lust, shame, folly, cruelty and imbecility ; its kindness and its love ; its power of thought, even when that is used by a sensualist. And as he sees in pity the lust of cruelty, so in lust he sees love. Behind all this he sees the soul, the power by which a man can approach all other men with the same joy and uplift of delight with which a lover goes to meet his mistress.

This sense it is which imparts to *The Idiot* its heart-breaking power. Myshkin loves and pities because he draws from the boundless well of love and pity which is in every man, if only you can tap it. But his pity is unlike any common pity because he never knows how different he is from the men around him. Never once does he “see himself” with that awful sense of the pride of superiority which forms the core of most men’s good works. But in these the man-god is not yet incarnated.

So much for the soil from which the man-god will feed his being. For there would be no soil at all, only rock, were it not for this something, this soul of love, behind the human material. Yet he will come down from the timeless regions, from the Absolute, where will and thought are the only realities. He will be a being who has explored all the paths where paths there are none ; he will have known all sin and all sacrifice, the extremes of doing and of suffering. When he

comes, having passed through all this, we shall know what God is.

There is a subtle irony in this argument, which is two-edged indeed. For if the man-god comes into being, a creature made by man's struggle, he will have done this by practising and developing a will that does good and evil indifferently because it lives at the centre of consciousness where both are known as one. But, if this be so, it would appear that the Immanent Will has merely been proving its divine nature by bringing forth good and evil together ; by working through the very same principle of mingled joy and pain which made Dostoevsky deny the goodness of God.

But this is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the argument against pain which is based on the Crucifixion.

In part Dostoevsky must have recognised this, for his most trenchant and most reasoned indictment against the fact of pain is put into the lips of Ivan Karamazov when he runs through just a few of the many millions of stories of child-torture that might truly be told.

These tears ? asks Ivan. " They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how ? How are you going to atone for them ?—what good can hell do, since these children have already been tortured ? And what becomes of harmony if there is hell ? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest the truth is not worth such a price." And thereupon he respectfully returns his entrance-ticket for the final transformation.

The voice is very like that of the Dostoevsky who stood in front of the picture of the Crucifixion and became an unbeliever. But this time the man who speaks is not Dostoevsky, but Ivan, or human reason, confessedly a half-creature, a being who realises that, since he has but a Euclidean or three-dimensional mind, he cannot understand God. Ivan in the Karamazov mythology is but a half-man. It is quite natural, therefore, for him to say : " To my thinking, Christlike love for men is a miracle impossible on earth."

Yet it was this miracle that was undoubtedly foreseen by the Dostoevsky of the heights ; this miracle and none other.



It was only the earlier Dostoevsky who could not see the cloud of cruelty sweeping away from the earth and from the memory of man. There are many pages written by this earlier Dostoevsky that one cannot bear to read twice for the sheer devilry of the human nature which they reveal. And yet the fool-critics have actually written of this man that he felt no indignation at evil ; that he rejoiced in the purification brought by suffering. The opposite is true, for his indignation burns to the very bone. When it scorches it is not a fire, but a caustic which cannot be wiped off.

All that Ivan Karamazov felt about cruelty came to him before he had learnt to realise the crowning horror of it : that he himself was responsible for it, since he was one in the depths of his nature with the most loathsome creature he knew, a true " reptile," the valet Smerdyakov.

We talk glibly to-day of the unity of all life as the idea that is rising above the horizon of thought, and perhaps of consciousness. But do we realise what are some of the implications of that unity ?

The Elder Zossima had one message for men : it was that each man is responsible for all men. And the monk used the aphorism as a moral guide ; seen so, it is quite beautiful, but Ivan realised the awful side of it, the strangling horror of the fact ; he knew that he shared the dark lust of the old dispensation, of Nature : in that sense he is Fyodor Karamazov ; he is, too, in the raging passion of his brother Dmitri and knows the horror of the flesh ; he, too, like Dmitri, could shrink from that " flat, crooked nail " on the right toe. And the man who has not seen in the human foot a suggestion of the primitive slime-creature is either very dense or very angelic. Ivan Karamazov is neither.

All this knowledge of oneness might be bearable, for it is vaguely known, but when it comes to the crawling Smerdyakov, when he sees that, however the old man, his father, was murdered, he can despise no man who took part in that deed, for on that night he, Ivan, was Dmitri, was Smerdyakov. He cannot leave " one reptile to kill the other," since he is the reptile, he is both reptiles. The communion of saints may be a reality one day, but at present the human consciousness has to work through the communion of blackguardry.



Yet Ivan, through the unspeakable pollution of his kinship, had passed into the new consciousness on that night when he knew that he and Smerdyakov were truly one. And if the unity included the "reptile," did it not also include Alyosha Karamazov?

And Alyosha in all his purity and love is also truly a Karamazov; Dmitri and Ivan, as body and mind, are torn in struggle, but they each find peace only in the society of their young brother. The bestial old ruffian, the father of the three sons, is at home with this boy; indeed, it is a fact, and an extraordinary one, that even this horrible being, old Karamazov, is almost likeable when he welcomes Alyosha and orders fish-soup for him. For the light that shines from those young eyes is like a splendid dawn that transfigures even meanness and horror.

The whole mystery of existence is in this amazing book, *The Karamazov Brothers*, which, in one way, is surely the strangest drama ever conceived; and in another, the ultimate outpost of human thought. For here the actuality of earth meets the reality of the timeless world. Karamazov and his sons are men who act in a household where the events are as dark with horror as in the tale of *Œdipus*, but they are also beings who typify the unrolling ages of human history and destiny. The book has its occult side, though it can be read as a tale of a life that is at once barbaric and spiritual.

On the occult side here is the Ancient Darkness that ruled through the life of pagan times; that Darkness is the life-giver: from its loins come all splendour, all horror: it is lust, for the law of its existence is desire and it casts forth its brood without memory or thought. But it is strong, even joyous, because it is not a house divided against itself. Doubt has never entered the citadel of its confidence.

For Ivan and Dmitri, who have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, there is nothing but division, conflict, the conflict of light and darkness, of mind and body, of sin and righteousness. Their house is divided against itself; the body seeks the joy of a maddening curve of beauty, and yet finds no peace anywhere in any curves of the flesh; the mind seeks its joy in finding order, and in all the universe there is no order to satisfy it. These two are the halves of the perfect man; they

go about seeking each other, yet not knowing what they seek. No Eden is open to them, for the snake of sensuality has closed the old one to them ; and to the new they have no right of entry.

Only Alyosha is all that Fyodor, the Father, is that Ivan and Dmitri are. He is more ; he has all that they had and yet is new. He is in the flesh the fulfilment of Kirillov's prophecy : it is all good to him, for he knows that it is all good. He is the miracle of the new dispensation, the child of darkness and separation, yet neither dark nor separated. He sits with a white, strained face while Ivan wades deep into the torture of the world ; he grieves at the corruption of his Elder's beloved body. He suffers with those who suffer. Yet not for long ; after the corruption of the grave he goes out into the dawn and kisses the earth for the joy of it. After "going apart" in sleep, or silence, he is renewed in strength, for he has the open pathway into the world where all is known.

The glimpses of that eternal peace and comprehension which come to the Idiot only in attacks of epilepsy, only as a sign of disease, are Alyosha's always : they are the signs of his health. God walks among men in the loving-kindness of this last son of the Karamazovs. Yet the acts of Alyosha, by which he shows his nature, his nature of the man-god, are trivial ; he runs errands of mercy, hastening here and there for others' help, even as though he were doing something for himself. He teaches schoolboys pity and love, by his own love ; he heals the wounds of many hearts, most of them very common hearts indeed. And he is happy ; that, of course, is the miracle, for he never seeks his own. Or rather, all is his own. Artistically speaking, he is the most amazing creation in literature, because of his simplicity. We feel without any shadow of doubt that this youth is in full consciousness of the oneness of all life. He has, therefore, no affairs of his own private life, for the lives of all are his ; he suffers their anxieties, and delights in their delight. He does not think of this oneness as a mental fact, as the new men of our world do : that is for his brother Ivan in his torture ; but he knows it in the sense that it is closer than breathing and nearer than the pulse of the heart, for when the heart pulses no more it will still be true.

None of the old tortured figures of those who, like Stavrogin and Svidrigailoff, agonised to bring Will into the universe or, like Prince Myshkin, laid down everything they had, could ever have dreamed of this fulfilment of their work. Yet they made Alyosha, as surely as he was made by the Beast, his father, and the agonised fighters, his brothers, Mind and Body. They had to die and vanish ; but Alyosha came through the gates of birth. The corn of wheat had fallen into the ground and died. But it brought forth much fruit. Alyosha is the answer out of the darkness for which so many of his forerunners have waited in vain.

But Alyosha signifies that the end of our form of civilisation is approaching ; and *The Karamazov Brothers* is one of the few dangerous books of the world. That, indeed, is why it is truly creative. Dostoevsky seems to have been quite aware that his ideas, his presentation of life, were dangerous to the unbalanced, for he goes out of his way in *The Idiot* to paint the pitiful case of the lad Hyppolyte whose weak brain drove him to a ghastly travesty of suicide ; and those half-insane, half-drunken figures who constantly dance across his stage are the very images of hysteria. Dostoevsky's wine was too heady for weak bottles. He puts into the lips of the prosecutor at the trial of Dmitri Karamazov a perfectly damning summary of the crimes, the monstrous and unnatural crimes, that are lightly committed during the break-up of a civilisation, and this in every country.

Civilisation, of course, has been attained by putting a strait-jacket on the instincts which had free range in the time of savagery. These instincts are not dead ; nor can they die, for they are the channels of vitality ; and the ape and tiger are as much alive under the surface in a modern city as ever they were in the jungle. They are caged by fear and in their narrow den they crouch, producing by their restlessness scores of physical ills. But at a time of tremendous change like the present they scent the free air above. They even escape here and there. Were they to break loose, life would return to a chaos infinitely worse than the primordial savagery because of the enormous power acquired by the knowledge of the civilised period.

The race is approaching a bridge, a bridge no wider than a

mere knife-edge ; on one side of this there is a slowing down of vitality which is a breeding ground of abnormal growths ; on the other, there is nothing but the return to a monstrous and self-destructive barbarism. In this position there is, in Dostoevsky's view, but one way out : by the birth of a new man, of a man who shall live and breathe in full possession of the consciousness of the actual oneness of existence for all the orders of life. That will mean release for all the instincts and powers of life, since these can safely be wielded by a being to whom his brother's joy is as his own—nay, is actually his own. That is the nature of Alyosha, who lives to himself, yet not to himself, for the joy of every living creature is his.

There are signs that this birth is at hand, and that the way of the man-god is being made clear. For the intellectual apprehension of the unity of life is spreading in all directions, from science to politics and from literature to philosophy. It is already appearing above the mental horizon as the religion of the future. It is only a creed that is recited at present ; and the man is not yet born who can fulfil Kirillov's prophecy and know that all is good. Alyosha has yet to come, for we cannot know this as a conscious fact. We are but the grains of wheat that must die, before the miracle of the new corn can happen.

This is what Dostoevsky brought out of the long purgatory of his life. It is yet another new thought out of Asia. But it comes, like that other new thought, into a world that is getting ready for it.



### CHAPTER III

#### WALT WHITMAN AND EDWARD CARPENTER

IN the course of its long journey mankind has set its heart on many objects of desire, but it seems, in most ages, to have overlooked the most obvious one ; that is, splendour of being. Only the Greeks appear to have worked consciously towards the attainment of this ; only the Elizabethans to have realised it through the spaciousness of their ideals. So that now, even to-day, the perfect proportion of the Greek, both in body and mind, and the audacity of the Elizabethan soul shine like brilliant torches over a drab sea of existence. Only during the last century there appeared a craving for balance of personality, for the harmony of the various elements that work together to make the human being. Men are growing sick of the disease of lop-sidedness. Soul has suffered only too long by the advancement of mind ; body has too long been victimised by both. The demand to-day, in some quarters at any rate, is for some synthesis that shall turn us into whole men.

Richard Jefferies voiced the craving for power and beauty of body ; for a soul-life as wide as the ocean and as all-pervading as the ether ; for a mind that conceives of no ultimate horizon. He began with desiring a splendid body and the joy of it. " In hard exercise," he writes in *The Story of My Heart*, " in sensuous pleasure, in the embrace of the sunlight, even in the drinking of a glass of wine, my heart has been lifted the higher towards perfection of soul. Fulness of physical life causes a deeper desire of soul-life."

If we compare this idea of " soul-life " with the conception of the soul in *The Imitation of Christ*, we perceive the tremendous depth of the gulf out of which mankind is climbing. For, in the view of Thomas à Kempis, in order that the soul,

as the most precious element of the man, may live, everything else must die ; whereas what Jefferies says is that the soul gains its strength and health through the strength and health of the body. The two conceptions are evidently worlds apart ; and the men of the older order of thought simply cannot understand what it is that Jefferies stands for. And when Jefferies proceeds to add to the three ideas " wrested from the unknown by the cave-men " : the existence of the soul, immortality and deity, a fourth, they part company from him, crying " Blasphemer " as they go. For the fourth idea is that of a " Soul-Entity, as yet unrecognised."

In these two ideas, the possibility of a completeness of personality for man that springs from the body and includes, in joyous comradeship, both mind and soul, and in the recognition in the universe of a vast Being, " A Soul-Entity," as an addition to our spiritual ideas, there is contained practically the whole substance of what Whitman and Carpenter have to say. Jefferies was in thought and in aspiration the forerunner of these two writers, since what he prayed for they actually in part attained.

On the face of it, it is the most natural desire in the world for a man to wish to be himself, fully himself : to rejoice in his thews and sinews, to build up, step by step, a structure of thought, to draw close in fellowship to all that lives. Yet this is the very last ideal he is capable of forming, so separated, so disintegrated is he ; the man of the study is often a weakling in body and timid in mind, a being who does not feel safe outside the leading-strings of authority ; the athlete is, in everything but body, a mere embryo ; and the man of the world is in the worst case of all, for he is a crustacean and has spent all his energy in clothing himself so that he can barely crawl for the weight of possession that he drags about with him. We understand well enough what is meant by a rich man, by an intellectual man, or a saint, yet each of these is, at best, but the third of a true man, a full man. We are such fractional creatures that it is only by herculean efforts that we can even conceive dimly what may be meant by a splendid personality.

It is actually, in fact, far easier for a modern to come to grips with the notion that Jefferies calls a vast Soul-Entity

than it is for him to visualise a complete man. For this Life Force, or Soul-Entity, is a conception that we have been straining ourselves to see for many a century.

And undoubtedly some of us do think we see it, however mistaken we may be in supposing so. Yet when lusty Walt comes shouting in his "barbaric yawp" that this vast world-spirit is incarnated in all men and women, in a common prostitute, and in Walt himself; when he bawls out that he knows all the secrets of it, we shrink from him.

For the Soul-Entity of the world has been in the past a thing of twilight aisles; or, in the more modern mode, of sunless lecture-halls and of rooms frowsty with the smell of books. To find it "quick," and not dead, is an almost intolerable affront to our sense of decorum. Smooth men, therefore, patronise Walt, and dear old Oliver Wendell Holmes reproves him: "The poets," says Oliver, "coquette with Nature and weave garlands of roses for her; but Walt goes at her like a great hirsute man—no, it won't do." Mr. Edmond Holmes finds that Walt is a "chaotic thinker and incoherent writer," but then Mr. Holmes does not trouble himself to discover what Walt means by the master-word of his vocabulary, which is—democracy. Decidedly the word has gone forth among the elect of the intellectual earth that Whitman "won't do." He is hirsute, rank, no weaver of rose garlands, no formal thinker. It is the same with Edward Carpenter, who tells us that his creative work, *Towards Democracy*, has never been seriously criticised in any literary journal of importance or standing.

All this is quite natural, for, since civilisation is built upon shifting sands and of timber that is mostly rotten, one stamp from Walt might bring the house down, since the art of being civilised consists largely in the acrobatic feat known as walking on eggs. There has always been something furtive about morality because of the numbers of facts in life that have to be wrapped up and hidden before they can be made decent. We are ashamed of practically everything as life made it; of the processes of our bodies, from procreation to death; of the possession of a soul, which we deny as carefully as we should the paternity of an illegitimate baby; of the cultivation of the mind, which we damn under the word "high-browism." Prunes and prisms rule more than drawing-rooms, and the



common men who plough and reap and fish speak of the writing men and thinking men as "they sort": the sort, that is, which has to be handled gently because it is so painfully conscious of the indecency of life. But to Whitman, as to Carpenter, the Nature that pours itself out in the ocean of form and consciousness is nowhere indecent, since it is alive in every atom of it with the spirit of God: in every atom; that is where these two part company with the theologians and the smooth men generally.

Mankind is being confronted now in every direction with situations that are too tremendous for the grasp of intelligences which have been trained to deal with everything piecemeal. Our method of living has carried specialisation in thought to the point of madness. We are all sitting in our separate boxes; the luckiest of us in glass ones, for then we can at least catch a glimpse of our brothers in theirs. Politically, we have, as statesmen, to face world problems; mentally, we are beginning to visualise a continuous ocean of life and matter; spiritually, we are called upon to face, not a half-god, nor a god of the dead, but of the living, and of all the living.

It is to the realisation of this god that we are called by Whitman. If you follow him, you cannot stay in your cranny, the little vantage point of stillness and separation which you have made for yourself. You must come "out from behind the screen," and take to the road "to that which is endless as it was beginningless." But we hate to realise the sweep of the road before us, and after reading *Leaves of Grass*, *Towards Democracy*, or one of those vast Russian books that are as limitless as the steppes themselves, one longs for nothing so much as for an old English country house, where they wash in saucer-baths, keep a butler and footmen and cling to the ideas of a "conservative octogenarian." After the winds of the field give us, we cry, the comfort of a feather-bed and curtains.

But this instinct, absurd as it seems, is the most deeply rooted of all the fears by which our present civilisation has been established and is the basis of our form of consciousness; to attack it is to attempt to root up human nature itself, the human nature of all the periods of history, in fact. For to have no feeling of "my own"; of my corner; of my vantage point; of my status; of my possessions; is to belong to quite



another way of reacting to life. For everything in our existence to-day, from the economic law of the markets to the articles of our creeds, rests on the principle of the separate soul ; of my soul as distinct from your soul and from the soul of the other man. And the highest point reached by our morality is that we should be just to him and deal with him according to the legalised weights and measures. We struggle towards this ideal, but for the most part make a bad job of its accomplishment. That these souls, or selves, are one, we recognise as a theory ; we can trace it back, in that sense, to the East and put our fingers on the Upanishads. But that we should actually realise the theory as true is quite inconceivable ; we know, in fact that we cannot, or our world would fall to pieces. To do so would be like the sudden failure of the law of gravitation, of cohesion.

Yet it is to this realisation that Whitman and Carpenter summon us. It is what Jefferies unconsciously meant when he prayed his prayer for greatness and completeness of being, for full completeness of being is only attained when the life of the All is expressed in the life of the one. This opens up a tremendous vista, an endless one, for each man ; yet in a sense it is already in the grasp of each man. For the branch of the tree—nay, even the merest twig—draws on the sap that circulates through the entire system of the tree. The only need is that the branch, the twig, the leaf, should draw on the sources of the tree-life and *know that it does so*.

The great principle of Whitman, therefore, is equality ; in *Democratic Vistas* he writes : “ In respect to the absolute soul there is in the possession of such by each single individual something so transcendent, so incapable of gradations (like life), that, to that extent it places all beings on a common level, utterly regardless of the distinctions of intellect, virtue, station or any height or lowliness whatever.” All men are equal, that is, because all men are, on the plane of absolute soul, made of the soul-substance itself, the soul which manifests itself in the universe. Therefore humility is out of place ; is absurd. The same Being out of the timeless world is revealed in the saint as in the prostitute ; and you and I are one with both ; in our depths we are of the same substance.

Towards the recognition of this unity the soul has been

working ever since mankind took to the two paths of development which it has been alternately tracing since the beginning of the evolution of man.

These paths, the one of mental, and the other of spiritual, unfolding and development, interweave like a plait made of two strings. At one period in Europe mankind will be found living in the sunlight of the reason, working out fresh courses of thought ; at another it is found turning from its exploration of the laws of matter towards the twilit places where the soul aspires towards the inner truth of both matter and consciousness. Jefferies calls the soul " the mind of the mind," the mind, that is, which would know directly, in the absolute, without the intervention of matter or intellect.

It is Maeterlinck who says that there are certain ages when the soul comes to the surface ; when man knows man directly, without reasoning from premises. Ages such as he here describes are found intertwined with the alternating ages of mental unfolding. Egypt's eight thousand years of the exploration of the world of the dead is the first historic period we can reach of this " soul-life."

It is this fact, of the soul " coming to the surface " in Maeterlinck's phrase, that gives to Egyptian art its air of strangeness, for its temples are tombs and its tomb-carvings but traps to catch the souls of the dead and keep them from wandering. The Greek age follows when the consciousness of humanity turns to the perception of mathematical proportion, to ideal men made by the intellect, in place of the Egyptian and Assyrian beast-gods which show forth the dark shapelessness of primitive chaos.

It is towards this splendid period of bodily and intellectual shapeliness that both Jefferies and Carpenter turn, the former wistfully, the latter trustfully. With the Greeks the consciousness of man turned away from the soul-life to the mind, but in Greek art, and particularly in Greek drama, there was a spiritual sense that is derived from Egypt. This idea of the soul persists in the conception of the Power Behind the shows of life which shines through in *Prometheus Unbound* and in *Œdipus*, and makes one critic declare that in the Greek drama " life swam in an ether of deity." The fruits of one age of development colour the atmosphere of the succeeding one and

the river of consciousness is always being swelled by new streams.

Greece yields to the next age of spiritual exploration in the tortured conscience of the Middle Ages, in their agonies of sacrifice and mutilation. Life again bursts into joyful singing at the reawakening of the intellect in the Renaissance, yet for a long while the two paths mingle and intermingle, and Fra Angelico paints the life of the spirit side by side with the artists who loved every attribute of pure body. The Puritan epoch again seeks the Kingdom of Heaven by pruning, till we are plunged in the full flood of the age of science with its final apotheosis of the sense of possession as the key to intellectual and bodily life.

As each period has passed, leaving its trace on the human consciousness, the gulf of separation between the soul and the intellect has been growing ever narrower, until, it would seem, the time is approaching when mind and soul will become one in feeling. But when that happens we shall then be on the eve of a new unity between the separate parts of man's nature and between his nature and the universe.

One of the difficulties of the present time is, in fact, that it is hard to keep our thought and faith in separate compartments. It is getting more difficult year by year, though in earlier times men apparently found it easy enough to leave their intellects behind them when they entered a church. But that was during the age when a man did right to his fellow, not because he felt that fellow's pain or joy, but because of a cold deity called Duty before whom he had bowed for ages. Yet already it is not duty so much as mere sensitiveness that makes men kind; when, that is, they *are* kind. The best watchword with a child even now is not, "It is right" to do so and so; but rather, "How you will hurt someone if you do so and so." For there is in the world to-day a spirit which says: "He suffers like you." It is a simple idea, yet immense, since it may finally merge in the perception: "He *is* you."

None of the creeds for which men have so freely killed each other in the past is as great as this bit of knowledge. And there may come a time when Hardy will have no need to show by a "transparency" the lobule of the Great Brain



that is Europe. We shall need no visualisation of this, for we shall realise it ; shall feel it.

Of the coming of this change in consciousness Whitman and Carpenter are prophecies. There is in their happiness something of the simple joy of Alyosha Karamazov in that moment when he goes out from the monk's death-chamber into the sunshine of the dawn. Like Alyosha, Whitman and Carpenter are good because they feel that all is good. They spend their strength in trying to tell us how good it all is. They would fain draw us away from that constant staring into the mirror of the isolated lonely self ; they cry out that we should yield ourselves to the sweeping flood of life that pours for ever through the universe. The sensation, they say, is that of one upborne on a huge tide, an upholding, exhilarating tide, that is made up of both elements of Nature's being, the organic and the inorganic. Says Whitman :—

" I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains,  
esculent-roots,  
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over."

Against this categorical statement one may protest, but one cannot misunderstand. I *am* these things, he says. So much for matter and its forms. In *Salut au Monde!* he deals with time past, with the ages.

" I see Christ eating the bread of the last supper in the midst of youths and old persons,

" I see where the strong divine young man the Hercules toil'd faithfully and long and then died,

" I see the place of the innocent rich life and hapless fate of the beautiful nocturnal son, the full-limb'd Bacchus,

" I see Kneph, blooming, drest in blue, with the crown of feathers on his head,

" I see Hermes . . ."

With all these he has been equalised by some divine " rapport." They are in him. So, too, are " The blind, the deaf and dumb, idiots, hunchbacks, lunatics, the pirates, thieves, betrayers, murderers, slave-makers of the earth." There is no selection here, no reverence ; none whatever—for anything less than the whole. And that is precisely what we cannot forgive this man, we who can only keep ourselves afloat in the welter of life by being " not as other men."



Whitman is as other men ; he loves them " quits and quits." Nor does he " make salaams," even to the Whole, for is not that himself? This man is, in another sense than Dostoevsky's, the man-god, with all his roughness crude upon him.

The only respect in which Whitman is incomparably smaller than Dostoevsky is in his vision of time ; to him " time " is not a mere idea of man ; it is an essential and it means mere duration. Whitman was " body " through and through : he could conceive of no existence apart from it. To him eternity is pure endlessness therefore. But he is endless, too : " I do not think seventy years is the time of a man or woman, Nor that seventy millions of years is the time of man or woman, Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me, or anyone else."

Whitman, feeling himself one with the " soul of things," would fain make us share this sense as the greatest in all the gamut of being.

But the " soul of things " is within as well as without ; the Middle Ages spent the effort of its life in exploring the world within, seeking Being in the depths of consciousness. Whitman moves outwards ; he would make us see in Time and Space the deity whose veil is matter.

" Give me to hold all sounds (I madly struggling cry),  
Fill me with all the voices of the universe,  
Endow me with their throbbings, Nature's also,  
The tempests, waters, winds, operas and chants,  
          marches and dances,  
Utter, pour in, for I would take them all."

It is his " vast elemental sympathy " with all forms of outward life that makes him so extraordinary to us, for the course of all aspiration of the highest kind has been away from the world of sense, which we have been taught to regard as unclean ; or, at best, as a veil which hides true Being. And this process has continued side by side with sty-wallowing in the life and matter we have tried to despise. Whitman's work is to put us right with Nature and with all the works of man. " Nativities," he says, " climates, the grass of the great Pastoral plains, cities, labors, death, animals, products, war, good and evil, these me." He is " the cholera patient and the handcuffed mutineer." He is—and we are.

It is the oneness of life here and now that he is trying to express through those strange and uncouth enumerations of his. Down into the obscenity of life he would take the spirit of burning fire, of the soul which sees itself reflected in all harsh and unlovely, as well as in all gracious things. He neither picks nor chooses, but we have built a civilisation by pretending to pick and choose. We have not succeeded, of course, for if you drive Life out of the window, she comes in at the door. We have, says Whitman, to begin again. To see the whole man ; the whole universe ; and the whole universe reflected in the whole man : that is the next step.

It is an electric shock to read Whitman if you can breathe the storm-wind that was native to him. If you cannot, he is little better than a madman. He is a rough man ; we are mostly veneered, and made smooth. We are genteel and timid, the creatures of a world full of evasions of Nature, a world choked with upholstery. We know, the expressive ones among us, next to nothing of the sweating toil of the earth ; nor of the potency of the men who wrestle with Nature ; those men for whose embraces tamed women have been known to pine and sicken. Such men are rank to our fancies ; the background of earth and sky may be a temple to some of us, but it is not known as familiarly as it is to the men who make it their workshop.

Whitman was terribly implicated with this sweating life of the flesh ; he wrote of the body electric to men who are ashamed of its nakedness ; he had a mind, not acute, nor sharp-edged, but voluminous, deliberate, immense and all-enveloping ; he lived among toilers and as a toiler. He believed in comradeship as a daily zest and heartener. "Queasy " ways come from the indoor life ; he knew nothing of such things. He was so implicated, as it were, in the flesh that he worked in it up to the elbows in hospital and battle-field, and to him, as to the ancient occultists, blood was the element of elements. He died slowly and painfully, as though he found it hard to unwind himself from the mortal coil.

His verse, as a poet, contains no rhythm for those whose ears have been trained only to hear the regular metres which satisfy man's sense of melody, but which by no means re-echo the strains of Nature's harmonies. Recurrent beat of some

kind, from "the right butterwoman's rank to market" up to the chanting lilt of the recitative, corresponds to that natural instinct in man for mathematical regularity in all his building. The verse may echo the sense, but then the sense is logical, even in the lyric. To such taste Whitman is, of course, simply barbaric.

Yet to the ear of a man who has ever succeeded in catching the rhythm of the wind in the trees, or the crash and roar of the sea, who has marched to the mighty music of the storm, Whitman's verse has a splendid singing quality when it is at its best. And *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed*, with its beautiful apostrophe to death, wrings a new melody out of the English tongue. But to hear Whitman's singing one must come out of the rhythm of an age, of a day, of a civilisation, and go back to something far older, to something that swayed and sang round the cradle of the race, before man went on two legs, or even on four. His rhythms follow the free flight of the wild birds. As he says: "The hawk, the seagull, have far more possess'd me than the canary or mocking-bird."

In one sense Whitman is no artist, for he could not select this thing and call it beautiful, or that thing and call it ugly. Yet the artist works by selection, by taking this stone and rejecting that. But Whitman would no doubt feel that *A Hand Mirror*, with its "outside fair costume, within ashes of filth" and its horrible list of the diseases of civilisation, is as beautiful, as important as that great utterance of the soul of man, *To Him that was Crucified*.

" My spirit to yours, dear brother,  
Do not mind because many sounding your name do not understand  
you,  
I do not sound your name, but I understand you,  
I specify you with joy O my comrade to salute you, and to salute  
those who are with you, before and since, and those to come  
also,  
That we all labor together transmitting the same charge and suc-  
cession,  
We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,  
We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of all theologies,  
Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races,  
ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are."



Put this utterance beside the ideal of *The Imitation of Christ* with its egoistic absorption in the world within the Self, and you will see two worlds, two dispensations, two forms of consciousness side by side. In *Leaves of Grass* there is no barrier, or shadow of one, between man and man, between man and the universe, no division of sex, or creed, or nationality, or character, or occupation ; for there are no limits to the vision of personality which inspires that book. The summing-up of this new order of consciousness is in the three lines :—

“ I have said that the soul is not more than the body,  
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,  
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is.”

Here we have, in fact, the answer to Jefferies' prayer : we have splendour of being for a man ; we have a fourth idea to add to our age-long conceptions that came from the cave-men of the existence of the soul, of deity, and of immortality. Here is his prayer : “ That I might have the deepest of soul-life, the deepest of all, deeper far than all this greatness of the visible world and even of the invisible ; that I might have a fulness of soul till now unknown, and utterly beyond my own conception.”

One man prays and another man receives the thing he prayed for ; but that is just and in the nature of things since Jefferies and Whitman are one with each other and with all men.

In their highest moments both Whitman and Carpenter reach that sense of the universal unity, and therefore of the universal rightness, which Dostoevsky knew only as a symptom of disease, in the momentary insight he enjoyed just before his fits threw him. But that either Whitman or Carpenter realised this new consciousness fully no one could contend. It is a faculty that has been evolving along the two paths of the intellect and the soul. Whitman and Carpenter drew very near to it, and mainly by the line of the intellect ; Dostoevsky approached by the spiritual path and came close to the true knowledge, but the light of it was so glaring that he could not endure it for more than a second. To the man born under the dispensation of self-consciousness, of the isolated self, the full dawn must needs be unbearable. And in Carpenter and



Whitman full realisation would probably have produced, not verbosity, but speechlessness. They came along the way of the intellect ; they retained possession of the power of analytic thought ; they therefore succeeded in telling us a good deal, far more than the man of authentic vision could do. The very essence of the power to breathe is that we do it unconsciously ; it is when we are choking that we trace something of the process. Dostoevsky's flash is wordless as to the process of its enlightenment, but Whitman spends himself in catalogues of manifestation in the attempt to show oneness, to prove the greatness of all that meets in man. The knowledge of what a " full " man really is has to be beaten into our brain. Yet revelation is not a matter of catalogues. And this is why Whitman is often repellent.

Carpenter has a more gentle way with us. He takes his readers by the hand and tells them far more of himself and of how this sense of the universal came upon him. It was after seeing Whitman, after reading the Bhagavad Gita and after the death of his mother, of whose near presence he was conscious during the time when *Towards Democracy* was being written. He was then living with the life of the open fields, of the sky, all round him, and the book came into being out of the inspiration of Nature herself. He always writes of that year as though it were a time of peculiar insight, as though he had tapped the sources of Being that were known ages ago and have never been closed to those who seek them.

The great difference between the view-point of Whitman and of Carpenter is that the latter sets himself more obviously to express the new consciousness as it will work itself out in the new social order. Whitman saw lovers and brothers everywhere ; he saw throughout the ages a long succession of Masters who have been leading mankind towards the recognition of the splendour of unity. Man, the microcosm of all Being, is his theme. But Carpenter bends over the surface of the old world as it now is, reading its lineaments in order that he may pierce through to a vision of the new order that is already shaping itself beneath the outer forms as the butterfly gets ready in the chrysalis. Over the entire world of to-day there is poverty, hatred, war, violence, misery, but below all this the new society is coming into being. The world is

pregnant of the new birth. Everywhere in men's hearts there is a network of desire, of sympathy, of potential oneness; this web runs below the surface everywhere for the eyes that can see it. "Democracy" for him, as for Whitman, is, of course, no political term, but the true order of society, the order that will come into existence when men are not merely self-conscious, as they are to-day, but are cosmically conscious.

His method of showing this process of the death of the old order and the birth of the new is a curious one. For he intersperses the scenes of the present with prophecies of the new, often passing from one to the other abruptly. Thus he will ask: "Do you think that it is a fine thing to grind cheap goods out of the hard labour of ill-paid boys?" That is the old world. Then he adds: "And do you imagine that all your commerce, shows and manufactures are anything at all compared with the bodies and souls of these?" And that is a bit of "new-world" knowledge. His *Triumph of Civilisation* is a haggard woman singing for pence in a street of fine houses, "but not a door is opened, not a face is seen, To certify the existence of humanity—other than hers."

And then we turn the pages and leave that base street and find:—

"Like a smiting and consuming flame, O Love, O Democracy,  
Even out of the faces and bodies of the huge and tameless multi-  
tudes of the Earth—  
A great ocean of fire with myriad tongues licking the vault of heaven,  
Thou arisest—  
Therefore, O love, O flame, wherein I burning die and am con-  
sumed—carried aloft to the stars a disembodied voice—  
O dread Creator and Destroyer,  
Do I praise Thee."

And then he voices the law of the new world:—

"The trees that spread their boughs against the evening sky, the  
marble that I have prepared beforehand these millions of years  
in the earth; the cattle that roam over the myriad hills—  
they are Mine, for my children—  
If thou lay hands on them for thyself alone, thou art accursed.

For I will have none that will not open his door to all—treating  
others as I have treated him."

This is put over against that triumph of our civilisation, the woman who begs for a copper ; to whom no door opens.

Whitman saw a man arise, a man of a new consciousness ; Carpenter sees the new world which that man will build, even as the old man has built the world in which we now live.

“ Out of the litter and muck of a decaying world,  
Lo ! even so  
I see a new life arise.”

Whitman and Carpenter wrest this secret of the future out of the lives of common men ; Dostoevsky brooded over the Cross till the passion of it tore and rent him. But he saw ; momentarily.

Yet the contrast between the deep inner calm of Carpenter, of Whitman, and the bloody sweat of Dostoevsky as he pursued his vision through the torture of the timeless world of the Will, is unspeakably great. Carpenter, seeing the new land, is full of joy in man's inheritance. But Dostoevsky saw no land ; only a gulf between time and the point when there is no more time, followed by a blinding flash of lightning across the gulf. Yet he gave birth in the creative world to a being who is really an inhabitant of the new land because he breathes easily and naturally in the air of it. Alyosha Karamazov could not have written *Towards Democracy*, because he had no idea that his consciousness was a new one, that he felt differently about life from anyone else. He just went about the world meeting people ; and the joys and sorrows of others were simply his. That was the miracle, of which he was unaware. And in his unawareness lies the miracle. There is no need for this younger son of the Karamazovs to preach brotherhood, or enumerate minerals, plants and men. Closer than the pulsing of his heart is Alyosha's brotherhood.

He has reached the goal which Whitman and Carpenter foresee, of which they enjoy a foretaste. It is natural, however, that both Whitman and Carpenter should be despised by those who can only travel along the line of the intellect. For these men have no eyes wherewith to see—a new consciousness, or to perceive its tremendous implications. Those, however, who do understand are afraid, for they realise that the main idea of both *Leaves of Grass* and *Towards Democracy* must

change everything in life as it is lived at present. And when the doctrine of the universal Self becomes, not a mere thought, but a part of breathing-life, everything in society will be changed—governmental systems, laws of property, sexual relationships, dealings with the animals, diet, clothing and housing. This new order will be no mere extension of our present society, but another one, an unrecognisable one from our standpoint to-day.

Already Carpenter and Whitman are loved by the people, mainly because both chose the life of the toiler; a few may perhaps actually understand something of what these men had to say. For the passion of the old simple world, when man was untamed because he daily touched his mother, Earth, is still in part alive in those who wrestle with matter for their daily bread. These men are nearer to the ideal of the "whole man" than the rest of us; they are nearer, therefore, to the comprehension of that man, vast beyond all telling, which it is the object of Whitman and Carpenter to paint.



## CHAPTER IV

### THOMAS HARDY

OVER the grassy hillside, a great fold of earth, comes a shepherd, carrying a lamb in the crook of his arm. Behind him the flock spreads fanwise into the fresh pasture. They baa as they go and the bell clangs on the leader's neck. The shepherd is an old man with a white beard and a "newgate frill" round his weathered, wrinkled face. "It's a shame to kill them," say I very foolishly. "Then don't you eat none of 'em," retorts the old man.

This is the Hardy country, and it is this picture of the hillside and the sheep that comes to me when Hardy's name is mentioned. The sheep; with a scent of burning weed in an autumn garden, or the dark purple of the heath. Shape and scent and colour, in fact; and all simple and close to the old life of the earth that outlasts creeds and kingdoms. His favourite opening for a story is a landscape with a man or a woman walking into it, usually hand in hand with sorrow, and most often on a day in autumn when the afternoon is "closing in." Hardy himself would never have been loved so kindly by us were it not for these simple, homely things; meads, plains and woods. He has little or nothing to do with "the salt, estranging sea." His characters are in keeping with his scenes, being of humble estate: these are the little creatures of field and hedgerow; Tess wringing the necks of the wounded pheasants; there is the rabbit caught in the fangs of a gin at the moment when Jude and Sue are also caught in that great gin, the social law; there is that "fellow-mortal," the pig, whose blood it was that dyed the snow at the moment when the process had begun which was to end in the killing of Jude Fawley's brain. It is of such creatures as these, both men and beasts, that Hardy makes the Lord say:—

“ Written indelibly  
 On my eternal mind  
 Are all the wrongs endured  
 By Earth's poor patient kind,  
 Which my too oft unconscious hand  
 Let enter undesigned.”

Whatever may be the case with the Lord, these, at any rate, are the things indelibly written on Hardy's mind.

In order to see this man most clearly we must put him beside the strangely different figure of Dostoevsky. Each of these two, this Englishman and this Russian, is concerned pre-eminently with pain; and because of pain's existence, because it runs like a thread through all the worlds, neither of them can endure the idea of the God who made it the law of life. Yet, though Hardy and Dostoevsky meet at this point, they come to it from utterly different and separate worlds. To Dostoevsky these hedgerow tragedies of Hardy's plane of thought were non-existent; to Hardy the great theatre of Dostoevsky's agony was imperceptible. For Dostoevsky had found the entrance to the timeless world where the soul suffers from strange flames, from strange frosts. But the tragedy of the Englishman's soul is that he cannot find this world of the Eternal at all, this world which was to Dostoevsky at once the source of his insight—and his hell. In *The Impercipient*, Hardy puts the fact simply and once for all:—

“ That with this bright believing band  
 I have no claim to be,  
 That faiths by which my comrades stand  
 Seem phantasies to me,  
 And mirage-mists their Shining Land,  
 Is a strange destiny.”

Yet this fact has, none the less, its compensations. For, because Hardy had no entry to that land, to that realm of sentience, it is still possible for him to think of it with the faith, if not with the insight, of the simple believer. If he has no bliss to die with, he has yet the possibility of it. But to Dostoevsky this timeless world in which he spent the most vivid moments of his existence was no Shining Land because he had realised it as a desert of darkness and fire; as something terrible, a Bridge of Doom, which has to be crossed.

We need not discuss which man is the happier, the man who has no heaven, or the one who knew how distant it is. Yet Hardy and Dostoevsky have one thing in common, for neither of them can ever breathe, "All's Well." Both, too, seek a God and a world for him to dwell in; and they find neither; only far off Dostoevsky foresaw the coming of both, of God and His kingdom.

Hardy, being sealed in the flesh, sees only Nature and physical man, both as tools of the Immanent Will, a Force that is utterly indifferent to the creatures of its begetting. His simile for this Will, his hieroglyph of the universe, is that of a knitter, bemused and dreaming, a knitter who cares neither for stitches nor for the pattern of the whole.

The thread on which the knitter works is sex, the primal curse. In this ancestry of life's family there is to Hardy only one fact which has in it something mysterious, something with the promise of hope about it. It is that in some way, though by what means no thought can tell, there has arisen in the blind tool of the Immanent Will, in man, a power to criticise the very law by which it was called into being. This is a fact from which there is no escape. In a universe which was otherwise god-proof, in a universe with which no god could interfere, or so one would have said, the incalculable has come about. And the blind agent of a blind Force sees what its creator saw not—the pain and wrong of the whole. This consciousness in man is the one divine mystery of Hardy's world, the one solitary gleam of hope. Man lies before the shearer, but he is not dumb. He asks, Why? Yet all the answer he receives from the Will is:—

" My labours—logicless . . .

You may explain; not I:

Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess

That I evolved a consciousness

To ask the reason why.

Strange that ephemeral creatures who

By my own ordering are,

Should see the shortness of my view,

Use ethic tests I never knew

Or made provision for!"

This strangeness is the abiding wonder of Hardy's mind ; it makes the barrier which he can never cross, for he, too, is "sense-sealed." In his view the one principle, sex, by which man comes into being, by which, in fact, he gets his sole chance of working out the possibilities within him, is the very means by which he cannot work beyond a certain point. In Hardy's view, man, like Bergson's echinoderm or arthropod, has worked up so far, only to find himself in a blind alley. The echinoderm failed because the Life Force made the fatal mistake of putting on a coat of mail ; the ants and bees, working along the line of action incessantly perfected by instinct, coiled themselves into circles through which they cannot break. Man, by choosing sexual instead of some other means of reproduction, went farther than either echinoderm or arthropod, but in the end found himself, like them, up against an unscalable wall. Procreation by sex is the extravagant way of evolution, since it takes such tremendous toll on the emotional and mental powers of each generation ; and when any man attempts to rise mentally on to a higher plane than that reached by the generations before him, he is pulled back to his original starting-point by the racial need of new births. A man here and there gets through—and up ; but he is never followed by the generations. He, as an individual, gained his point of vantage by a tremendous sacrifice, a sacrifice too great for his fellows to pay. The new race can never be born, so terrible is the cost of producing its mere fleshly habitation.

And so the world of men is a race-course where the whole field is dismounted at the hurdles and lies, rolling on the wrong side and in agony. There each man awaits the merciful blow of death. It is a dreadful spectacle and made yet more terrible by the fact that to put these riders even on the course has cost the pain of untold and invisible millions. Life is, then, a mere tournament of the frustrated ; and the wisest thing for any man to do is to walk very humbly and never to dream of even entering the lists. In that way alone can he hope to escape the backward plunge at the jumping-place. But even the humble ones, those who never attempt a step forward, are apt to be involved in the fall of others, and Marty South at the grave of Giles Winterborne has suffered



her loneliness because others stirred around her on the race-course that is life.

Nor is there any escape from this law of struggle and ultimate frustration in the world where the emotion of sex is presumably absent. It is even impossible for Hardy, like Wordsworth, to conceive of the greatness of Him "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns"; for that greatness, to him, is merely made fine by the dust of earth. No, on the whole the wild life of fields and woods is even worse than the human plight, since it is without those "life-loyalties" that are sometimes found among men. When Hardy enters a wood, and dreams of respite from struggle, this is all that happens:—

" But, having entered in,  
Great growths and small  
Show them to men akin—  
Combatants all."

Even this is not the end of Hardy's attitude towards the sorry plight of those who are alive; for, although he is of the modern way of thinking and sees the struggle of the Life Force as the agent of creation, he is yet also akin in the temper of his mind to the Greek dramatists. Behind the blindness of the Immanent Will that works by sex, he sees something darker still, and even stranger, for what he sees is Destiny; and a mocking Destiny at that. He out-Greeks the Greeks themselves, in fact, for behind their great figure of Nemesis, however blindly it may appear to work, in the Greek tragedies there persists some idea of justice, the justice of the eternal world. True, this justice cannot be understood by our reason, and therefore there seems to us to be an element of the perverse, of the fantastic, in the way it works.

So far the Greeks went; but Hardy's Fate is all made up of perversity, and with him the "President of the Immortals" is almost always in an incurably sportive mood where poor mortals are concerned. If you watch, indeed, the way of a cat, not with a mouse, but with a beetle, you will see the very image of Hardy's Fate. The cat will give from time to time a slight pat with its paw to the insect, thus turning the creature out of its path. Bewildered at the strange interference which has descended upon it out of the sky, the beetle

bustles away once more, when, quick as lightning, comes yet another pat and again the poor creature is turned out of its way into another. Meanwhile the cat is not malicious at all, but is merely enjoying a joke. And this last touch of irony in the whole affair is, to the unhappy insect, man, quite the unkindest cut of all.

Outside all the ruling of blind Will there is, then, to Hardy's thought a power behind that plays with man and does this for the cat's reason—because it is a jest. Thus, the catastrophe of *The Return of the Native* turns on nothing more than the fact that Mrs. Yeobright and Damon Wildeve converged on a certain day from different points of the Heath towards Clym Yeobright's house.

But is it not also the tragedy of Orestes that an old man went out from Thebes towards the west and a young man went north from Corinth? And if we ask why they did this, and so met at a cross-road, we may say it happened either through Chance or Destiny; but whichever word we use, we are still referring to—the Cat. And Orestes was fated to kill his father, not because of something in his character in the first instance, but simply because an unseen player was interfering in the game. And the same player it must have been who put the viper in Mrs. Yeobright's path.

There is, too, very strongly marked in Hardy's thought the main idea of the Greek principle of Nemesis; that all rebels against the order of things as they are, and have been since the beginning, are bound to be struck down as a punishment for impiety. If one would, therefore, avoid the lightning-flash, one must avoid the heights. To act forcefully, even to will firmly, is to awake the jealousy of this power. Thus, Damon Wildeve, the ambitious innkeeper, and Eustacia Vye, the exotic born for a city, but lost on a Heath, seek escape from their lowly lot; Clym Yeobright seeks to know more, to think more deeply, than other men; Jude would enter the world of intellect; the lad in *Two on a Tower* would push out into the starry world; Sue would risk the large freedom of the untamed woman.

They are, each and all, struck down. Nor are they merely pulled back by that fecundity of Nature which would always

have more and more life ; they are the victims of a malignant Chance. that huge and devilish Cat which plays with insects. This Cat waits at every cross-road of action and works often in conjunction with the Will that moves by sex, so that at times both Cat and Will appear to be the same creature. It is sex that works when Arabella flings a portion of pig at Jude and when Alec D'Urberville overtakes the work-folk at the edge of Cranborne Chase, but is it not fate that takes a hand when Jude enters one public-house rather than another, and when Tess and Angel elect to pass their wedding-night in a farm that is saturated with the D'Urberville memories, and not within the plain walls of some new house which should carry no message to Clare's fastidiousness of sensual deterioration ?

Between the bodeful Hag, sex, and the mocking devil who sits at the four ways, it is often hard to discriminate. But in order to escape both there is but one thing to be done ; one must live like Granfer Cattle, who was always as ready for a funeral feast as he was for a wedding ; or, like his son, Christian, who knew no greater grief than that no woman would have him because he was born on a night when there was no moon. But even this poor tool suffered, though it was but by the rejection of the Will.

In this sense of the Nemesis that waits on everything which aspires, on everything which acts at all, we sap the deepest sources of Hardy's inspiration. For the Life Force which works throughout existence he, of course, found in the thought of his age. He was a youth in the days when George Eliot was writing of the heavy hand of the law of life ; and long before Bernard Shaw found a chance of " playing the great game " within the sweep of its power, had not Schopenhauer written his great Essay on the Metaphysics of Love ?

But Hardy's view of Fate as the great Cat comes neither from his reading nor from the breath of the Time Spirit ; it was not born in his mind when he watched Science grappling with Religion, for it was in his very blood and fibre long before he was conscious of these things. Hardy in this matter of Fate, of Destiny as a mocker, has done nothing more than carry into literature the great peasant formula " it was to be."



It is difficult to say of the peasant, even now after nearly two thousand years of the preaching of Christianity, whether he believes in God, but one thing he certainly does believe in, and that is the abiding power of ill-will which lurks in the background. This is none other than the ancient darkness of the pagans, a great realm of power, in fear of which you must go softly all your days—lest you awake it to action. You must be as unobtrusive as possible on the stage of Being, lest it remember you. The old man of whom it is recorded that he cried out to the bearers when they were carrying the coffin of his dead wife into the churchyard, "Don't 'ee shake her, my dears, whatever you do," was, of course, only mindful of the fact that she had once before come to life again out of a cataleptic trance. Yet his saying describes quite accurately, in that "Don't 'ee shake her," the typical peasant's attitude to all malignant entities, whether these be gods or wives.

This spirit of "it was to be" is, of course, inextricably mingled with the force of the sex power. For, as Schopenhauer saw, "it was to be" is the very essence of the way the Life Force works when two mortals are "wanted" as parents of a being that has to be born of them. Therefore when his daughter comes home to bear a "baseborn" infant the peasant says, "It had to be"; and an old woman of Wessex will express her view of the sex imbroglio when she remarks that a girl is to a boy—"Just mate (meat) before a hungry dog."

No one can understand Hardy who does not know Wessex. And Wessex is not the England of fat acres and great farms which George Eliot and Trollope knew. It is an individuality of whom you cannot think in terms of tilth and pasture. Its bare hills, sloping like green waves caught and stilled, its Heath, so darkling under cloudy skies, its Great Plain where stand the Stones of Sacrifice, its barrows and hill-forts, its men with profiles derived from the men who sleep below knightly brasses of Portland stone, are all nothing but moods of a gracious, yet untamed, personality.

Here Nature seems able to take part in the drama of human life more easily than in other places. And in the legends of Wessex there are curious signs that she is believed to have actually done so. Near Lulworth, for instance, there is a long



chine of hill running inland from the sea, called Grange Hill. On the seaward end it starts from the prehistoric hill-fort of Flowers Barrow, a place of a far-off battle long ago, where lies to this day the dust of the dead. One November night, in the year when England was quaking with fear over Titus Oates's plot, a host of warriors, to the number of many thousands, was seen advancing along the ridge from the sea and the barrow. Not one man, nor two, saw them, but hundreds of the inhabitants, and the owner of Creech Grange was so convinced of the invasion that he set off instantly to Wareham and got the garrison out. The militia was called up and information sent to the Privy Council in London. Yet, though the host had even clashed arms as they marched, it was no more than an army of shadows.

But in Wessex the shadows of race after race seem to pass across the soil that is now made in part of their dust : Roman and Briton, Saxon, Dane, and man of the stone ages, they have all been here ; it is they who give, in fact, to Hardy's pictures of life the sense of strange greatness which comes when any realisation of the shortness of man's span of time is pressed home on the heart. The passions of men and women, even the moulds into which their characters flow, are never truly new, but only an old story retold. This sense of the quick passing of the generations, combined with a feeling for the revolving seasons, gives an air of dignity to the simplest tale that is told with such a background in time and space.

The air of some of Hardy's scenes is heavy with the passion of Nature's burgeoning time ; in others the icy grip of winter's death, when it brings the birds from the wastes of the Arctic, is closely interwoven with the death of human hopes. No other writer gives so strong a sense of the ebbing and flowing of man's pulses in time to the throbbing of great Nature's heart. And in one instance, the life of a man, and his death, are bound up with the life and death of a tree. Perhaps, indeed, no other English writer so truly sees man as only one of the many children of the Great Mother, although this sense it is that makes the beauty of the Greek conception of Demeter.

It should be noted, too, that on several occasions in

Hardy's novels there occurs the intrusion of a character into modern life who truly belongs to the incarnation of a much earlier race. Thus, Henchard, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, is a man born in the wrong century, a man whose strength and simplicity of purpose would have made him a success as a tribal chief. He sells his wife like any Danish pirate and then, on awakening next morning, finds himself in the nineteenth century. He oscillates throughout the story between to-day and a long bygone yesterday, being in all essentials a man who should have lived when the Mai Dun outside Dorchester was alive with skin-clad warriors. Whenever he is forced to action in the comparatively complex life of Casterbridge, at the period when fortunes were made and lost on the price of home-grown corn, he winds himself up in the chains of folly, but when he can act in the primitive strength of his own true nature, he wrenches himself out of his difficulties. When he sees to what gulf of misery his acts are leading him, he has a will strong enough to kill the evil threatening his peace. But he sees this so seldom that the end is ruin. He is a man great in the power of simplicity who, because he is in the wrong age for his qualities to find their effect, is brought to naught by a trivial man who fits the niche he has chosen.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* Hardy is at work on the topic which is most significant in his work: on the questions that arise, the problems that have to be solved, when a change is at hand, either in the social state itself, or in the life of a character, or group of characters. It is, in fact, that "step in life," whether it be taken by the Life Force or by a man, which tests the power of the greatest writers.

In *The Return of the Native* the contest is a much greater one than the struggle in *The Mayor*, for it is nothing less than a phase of the age-long battle which is incessantly being waged between the primitive, blind and indifferent power of Nature and man's individuality, his will to know and create a new world of thought and effort which shall not depend on the earth-life, or at least not directly.

Clym Yeobright, himself a countryman, has only love for the rough country life, but he would find, in the world of the intellect, a consciousness apart from it. Wildeve and Eustacia want something simpler, something that Paris could give or,

for the matter of that, any modern city. In this struggle all three are worsted, at first by the Life Force of sex, but in far more deadly earnest by the Heath, that dark, sinister and unchangeable symbol of the beast, the ancient darkness, from which all things, including man, are born.

The part played by the Heath in *The Return*, and by the little country town in *The Mayor*, is changed in *The Woodlanders* into a strangling, silent destroyer, typified by the wood itself, where one tree sucks the life out of another, and where the forces of damp and decay are always at work unseen. Such a strangling, insidious force it is that pulls down the men and women in the little woodland village. Nature takes a hand in Hardy's work, because life in Wessex, even human life, is part of a tremendous drama of events that follow the circling of the planet itself. In this drama the races and peoples that have passed seem almost to push from their stools the people of to-day. For there is a sinister life even now in many corners of this scarred old land: as in the Roman amphitheatre outside Dorchester where, in Roman days, the lions fought with Christians, and where in the eighteenth century a woman was burnt for having murdered her husband. At Corfe Castle there still persists in the shattered ruins the hanging tower, as well as in every churchyard the spot, thick in docks and thistles, where the outcasts found a grave. Such places live a sinister life of their own, for nothing is past till it has faded from the memories of all the living. And in Wessex they seem to have particularly long memories.

Hardy was born on the border of the great Heath that is traditionally the scene of Lear's madness. He was the son of one of those village craftsmen who did so much to keep alive the spirit of mediæval workmanship. There runs, therefore, in his blood not only the fatalism of the peasant, but also the instinct for form and handicraft that is shown in many an altar-tomb of Portland stone, in many a carved bench-end.

The young Hardy served his apprenticeship to letters by writing love-letters for the village girls. For it is a queer fact that the very man who found it hardest to perceive a design in the ruling of the world is precisely the one who was trained by happy circumstance for the work of his life. To this



fortunate opportunity of seeing into the hearts of women the boy's mother added the means by which he could be introduced into the world of classic form ; she presented him with a copy of Dryden's *Virgil*. But " form " is, to the artist, the mysterious magnetism which calls his creations into life. And this principle of line and shape, of design in the larger sense, was all around the boy Hardy, even in the very moulding of his homeland. Here in Wessex one can see the bones of the earth-shape, both in the cutting of the bare hills as well as in the surface carving of the Heath with its " plantings " of pines, its curving paths of yellow sand threading the purple in all directions. There is in this something of that shapeliness which makes Italy so pre-eminently the land of form with its carven hills, its peaks and crags, its sinuous winding rivers spread out in broad valleys.

Twelve years of work at architecture, at the most exact art in the world, completed Hardy's training in line and curve ; in the supreme art of making each detail duly serve its part in the whole effect.

The time of Hardy's birth is as significant as its place. He stands, in 1840, mid-way between the new age and the old ; he watched as a lad the change from an agricultural England to a commercialised, industrial one. He saw the destruction of the country aristocracy by the Repeal of the Corn Laws. He may have talked with a man who had sat in a pillory ; he lived during the period of village choirs and Christmas masques. The natural business of his stories is therefore concerned with the breaking down of one form of society before the advent of another.

In the world of the mind the same note of change was sounding in 1840. When Hardy was first awaking to the questions of thought, Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce were thundering at each other the watchwords of Religion and Science. When Hardy was nineteen, *Adam Bede* and *The Ordeal of Richard Ferval* appeared ; the one a fervid appeal to conscience, the other a clarion call to intelligence. For the world was awaking from the sleep of satisfaction in every direction ; industry was killing agriculture, and with it the old country peace ; Browning's " All's Well " was yielding, in some minds, to Ruskin's indictment, in *Unto This Last*, of the



smug morality of the earlier years of the century. "Awake, ye that sleep!" went forth the cry, both from intellect as well as conscience. This tocsin sounding in the young Hardy's open ears, he ranged himself on the rebel side; on the side, that is, which was struggling towards freedom of thought. He sees, as the guiding power, not the God of man's childhood, an anthropomorphic projection of the fancy, but what is no doubt an equally hypothetical entity, the First Cause of a more scientific age. Nothing of all this, however, appears in any way to have changed his peasant-like attitude towards existence. To Hardy, as to the simple countryman, what a man is to be and to suffer is decided long before he is born, by influences which are entirely beyond his control. And breed is to the peasant the very casting vote, since it sends the beast to the butcher and the man to the woman.

In his regard for pain, however, Hardy and his peasant ancestors part company, for to the countryman death and agony are so much a part of the life of all living creatures that he notices these things no more than he does the very air itself. Hardy is, however, one of the great company of moderns who sense the unity of all life through pain, and through little else. Not even in Heaven itself could a man of this nature—or so one would swear—forget the pain of the flesh in beast and man; the misery of disappointment, loneliness and shame that is possible to all the higher creatures. Pity it is that sweeps through Hardy's soul as though it were a harp swept by the immortals. He feels it more than even Christ could do, for to Christ it seemed that the fall of a sparrow is part of the divine plan, but to this Man of Wessex only one thing is clear: that is the pain of the sparrow.

As an artist, he passes first through a stage of pure fatalism to the determinism of his greatest period, when he seems convinced that it is through character alone that destiny comes to a man. It is not till the third stage of his career that Hardy comes down into the arena and directly indicts society for the cruelty it showers on every being that defies its artificial laws. Tess is not "ruined" by any event that made her in any way a worse woman, but only a finer and more intelligent one. But no one will acknowledge this, simply because everyone is in bondage to that potent fear of social man that, if

such a fact is acknowledged, a stitch may actually be dropped in the chain of the common respectability. On a desert island alone Tess would be none the worse for what befell her.

It is hard to see in *Jude the Obscure* so clear a challenge to society ; for one cannot conceive of any form of civilisation in which Jude would not come to grief of some sort. If a man cannot balance the different parts of his nature more successfully than he does, that man is bound to have his portion with the swine, in some form or another, though he may not end, as Jude does, in a pork-shop. The outward degradation of that is the price paid by his poverty, not by his lust. It is not, of course, the Life Force alone, nor poverty alone, that brought Jude to damnation, but the interaction of the two malignant powers. Yet, even so, one cannot, in reading this book, see him as a victim in the sense that Tess is one. Tess suffers at the hands of others ; Jude is the more deeply damned since he is his own enemy. And, taking the matter to a higher court, one may justly ask, Whose is the responsibility for his making ?

Hardy's characters may be divided into four classes. First there is the average sensual man, such as Fitzpiers and Alec D'Urberville. These are apt to have red lips and are rank incarnations of the virile Will to Live. Second comes the class of honest countrymen, of simple homespun make. Such are Diggory Venn, Giles Winterborne and Gabriel Oak. They love life, but affection keeps passion in check. They suffer defeat, but sometimes are rewarded—with others' leavings in the way of women. No fiction has conceived any finer type than this. The third is the gently ambitious class who are apt to be dragged by stronger people into trouble. They are often chameleons in character and are always hard to draw. No one has given them in more truthful fashion than Hardy. To this class belong Mrs. Yeobright, Grace Melbury and Tess herself. Fourth come the wrestlers, the thinkers and strivers, and all those who will a new thing. And round these the battle rages in every book. They are like spirits torn between mind and body, between the gross and sensual beast of primitive life and the ascendant, upward striving will of man. Everywhere they are pulled back ; often they are crucified. And their symbol of subjection, their lure, is woman. And

as lure, it is the woman who suffers the harder fate of being at once temptress and victim.

The true battlefield on which all this is fought is at the place where civilisation seeks to tame Nature and to shape her. This strife must go on. Nothing can end it but, in Hardy's words, "a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social machinery than that which now jolts us round." Then he adds mournfully: "but such completeness is not to be prophesied, or even conceived as possible."

It is Hardy's habit in many of his books to gather into one fine passage a summary of the idea which has formed the framework of his story. Sometimes this appears as an Epilogue, as in Marty South's speech over the grave of Giles Winterborne; sometimes, as in *The Return of the Native*, it opens the scene of the story; in *Far from the Madding Crowd* the description of the night sky that hangs above the hill where Gabriel Oak is tending his lambing flock is the epitome of the whole book. For there—if anywhere in literature—we have earth's beauty of starlight and dawn. The men and women in the book are as dwarfed by the great background of sky and earth as they would be in some vast temple of the gods. Never again did Hardy reach the sheer beauty of this idyllic novel, because, as the current of his genius deepened, he became more and more involved in the passionate plight of mankind. The background persists in these later stories, but it has receded, till even in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* we lose our sense of the circling wheel of Nature's year in the loud throbbing of human pulses. But in *Far from the Madding Crowd* it is Orion and the Pleiades that give the key-note of the drama.

In the same way, the meaning of all Hardy's work and thought is summed up in his Epic-Drama, *The Dynasts*. For, so far from being a divergence from his long course of novel-writing, it forms the culmination of the whole series. *The Dynasts* is, in fact, to Hardy's career what Marty South's speech is in *The Woodlanders*: it gives the *motif* round which all his life and thought have centred.

In this tremendous drama of the Napoleonic Wars, where armies move and statesmen plan, where the great destructive Will that was "born of Ajaccian womb" plays havoc with



kings and peasants, the true subject is the question, What is the Immanent Will of creation? Does it reside in the units, the cells of its being, whom we call individual men; or has it a consciousness of its own, apart from men?

The issues of life or death for the human race depend on the answer to this question. For if the Life Force, the Immanent Will, is a matter of a crowd of beings all shouting together, then by influencing the units of that crowd, it may be possible to alter the direction in which their co-operant will may move; but if they are mere automata moved like pawns on a chessboard by the Will of one mighty dreamer, then how shall all man's efforts alter in one jot or tittle the fiat of the power behind the human lot?

Such is the riddle proposed in *The Dynasts*, for it is to this dilemma that all Hardy's life of thought has led him.

In order to make his proposition clear he puts before the imagination of his reader certain Intelligences, such as the Spirit of the Years, or of the Earth. All these are mere finger-posts to direct our thoughts; all, that is, save one set of Intelligences. The Chorus of the Pities has a creative part to play, for it is on these alone that we must rely for any possible hope of a happy issue out of humanity's evil plight. In the first place, they are but young Spirits, being entities who appeared no earlier in Earth's history than the Tertiary Age. And these Pities bring with them three qualities which were entirely unknown in earlier times. First, they feel that sorrow for pain which springs from the modern discovery of sentience; second, they are conscious of a groping advance towards the idea of a change and, stranger still, they feel a certain belief in the possibility of it. No other Spirit, except the Pities, has the slightest idea that change is possible; for to the Earth Spirit and to the Spirit of the Years what has been will be. Third, the Pities feel a prescience of the need for another kind of ruler than this "Intractable," Napoleon. They pray for the quick advent of new men:—

" Men surfeited of laying heavy hands  
Upon the innocent,  
The mild, the fragile, the obscure content  
Among the myriads of thy family.  
Those, too, who love the true, the excellent,  
And make their daily moves a melody."



These hopes are but timid and deprecating ; for always there remains, unsolved to the end, that dread question, What of the Immanent Will ? Is it in the pigmies, men ; or is It a Personality whom we cannot change by any changing of our tiny wills ? But even if it be so, the Pities still cry :—

“ Yet It may wake and understand  
Ere Earth unshape, know all things, and  
With knowledge use a painless hand,  
A painless hand.”

This is, in modern form, the riddle of the Sphinx. And Hardy is too honest to attempt to answer it except by a sigh of hope.

When, years earlier than *The Dynasts*, he wrote *The Darkling Thrush* and caught his inspiration in the singing of an aged thrush in a copse that was “ spectre-grey ” with frost, the hope he found was this :—

“ So little cause for carollings  
Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
Afar or nigh around  
That I could think there trembled through  
His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.”

Hardy has attained no higher vantage point of certainty in *The Dynasts* than he had in this early lyric, but even this “ blessed Hope ” in a man so honest, and so little inclined to make the wish serve as father to the thought, is strangely impressive, even heart-shaking. One fact, however, he registers as proved, a fact new in the unfolding drama of existence : that the tools of Life are “ shapes that bleed.” To the dark beast of nescience out of which Life has evolved even this truth was unknown. And if the tools themselves realise this, may not the Mighty Will discover it in time ? For, at any rate, the cells in a man’s body do bring health, or fever, to the whole personality ; they change his thoughts and play what stop they will with his passions. If the cells change, the man changes. The law of the microcosm

may be the law of the macrosocsm in this as in other matters.

Man is torn by love and passion: this is the price he pays for "going on." He is torn, too, by storms of hate and the passion of war. Hardy's analysis of the causes of war rests entirely on the paltry folly of all men. The King refuses to reply to Napoleon's letter in terms that recognise the Emperor as the "equal of the King of England"; this is none other than the snobbery of the mean street that depends on "keeping up one's dignity." Then the party jealousies of the House of Commons never cease for a moment even in face of so grave a peril. These rulers are too parochial to see what threatens them, and the world of rank and fashion is but full of the "tickling horror from abroad" and all the morbid joy of it.

The folly of the great is matched by the imbecility of the people. The women believe that Boney "lives upon human flesh, and has rashers o'baby every morning for breakfast"; the men fear that, if King George were kidnapped, "we should have nobody to grin at through horse-collars." It is easy to inflame such fools with fear and rage. The soldiers vary between "We be the king's men, hale and hearty," the spirit of devil-may-care; and of fatalism: "I've took to drinking neat, for, says I, one may as well have his innerds burnt out as shot out, and 'tis a good deal pleasanter for the man that owns 'em." The monstrous blasphemy of Napoleon's words in the matter of the throne of Italy—" 'Tis God who has given it to me," is reproved by the Spirit of the Pities, but not by the Archbishop, for Christianity is more abject by far than any other creature to the tyranny of Life's "impulsion by Incognizance." And in *The Dynasts* "earth's jackaclocks," men, are "fugled by one will," that of Napoleon, because they are willing to be tools.

We are then shown the figure of Europe as though it were a vast transparent body, with its blood flowing visibly, its nerves thrilling, its muscles rippling, with armies that crawl and writhe and fall: the cells of the vast body which is but a lobule in the brain of the Universe. Here is, perhaps for the first time in the history of thought, a visualised form for the Life Force.

*The Dynasts* in its tremendous sweep sums up the spirit of the age that saw the First Cause of Being in the shape of the Will to Live. Throughout Hardy's work as an artist his architectonic gifts, his power of constructing a four-square and shapely scheme, has formed the essence of his power. And it is this faculty which keeps the *Dynasts*, for all its vast scope, held together as a conceivable whole. This great Epic-Drama must take its place among the highest summits that have been reached in literature. It stands beside *Faust*, beside *Paradise Lost* and the *Divine Comedy*. Each of these registered a tide-mark of human thought. So, too, does *The Dynasts*. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is the timeless world as it was conceived by the Middle Ages: a place whose boundaries were defined according to the cosmogony of the schoolmen. *Paradise Lost* is a drama of the Will, for slowly, with the Miltonic age, we are coming into touch with the modern reaction to existence that bases all things on the conception of pure Will—the Will of God and the Will of the beings to whom He has given birth. With *Faust* we come to grips with the question, What is man, the individual? What are the realms of feeling in which he can live, the planes of Being he can realise?

In Hardy all this questioning is present, of course, as the inalienable inheritance of the past. But he turns, because he is a modern who lived after Darwin, after Schopenhauer, after Samuel Butler, from Milton's Angel, from Goethe's man, from Dante's worlds, to consider that great conception, that Being, which is the centre of all thought to-day, the Personality who appears under many names—as Will to Live; as the Immanent Will; as the Life Force; as the *élan vital*; as a stream of tendency. The question Hardy asks in *The Dynasts* is, What of that Being's future?

This question and the curious tentative answer he gives to it must needs put Hardy among the builders of the century. For no one has as yet in literature so vividly realised this supreme Figure as Thomas Hardy.

All his life, in his novels, he has been working to show the past and present phases through which this Supreme Entity has passed and is passing. These phases come to him in sounds that are like the woeful voices of the sad sea; in

Hardy's work "the still, sad music of humanity" is little better than that wailing at hell-gate which so horrified the passers-by in the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

But Hardy's answer to his own question, What of the future of this vast Will whose past is so terrible? contains no certainty at all. He sees only that through consciousness in its ever-widening scope has come our realisation both of the Will itself, of its limitations and—a long way after—of its possibilities. This consciousness it is that brought all our woe. Yet it is nothing less than this same consciousness which may take its way by further "informing" the Will until, at long last, "it fashion all things fair." So closes down the curtain on the universal drama of existence which has been unfolded under the guise of the War with Napoleon.

Hardy looks forward, not to any miracle, but yet to a possible redemption. His view takes the outward, not the inward, course; for, instead of a changed vision for man, he sees—the map of Europe. His aim is the visualisation of all social life as bound together into one, as are arteries, bones, nerves and muscles in the body of a man. Where Dostoevsky looks forward to the moment when the eyes of the many will be opened so that they see, what mystics have seen in every age, the unity of the spirit of life, Hardy sees in *The Dynasts* the other side of the great mystery, the unity of the body of flesh. His "transparency," his picture of the vast lobule of a brain which is Europe, is a foretaste of a new art, a new iconography, the art and the iconography of the time to come.

There is in all this no question of an apocalypse, no crossing of a gulf between self-consciousness and cosmic consciousness. The miracle of this vision of unity will be worked, if it is worked at all, by the slow training of the will of man to sympathy; by the slow training of the mind of man to see the truth—that no bee can be joyful until all the bees in the hive are happy too. Man is to learn through his own pain, through his own sense of the pain of another. There is to be no Day of the Lord, when the great darkness shall be followed by a flash of vision that shall make all things clear: such is the raising of the Curtain which the Russians see, which Whitman saw.



To all this Hardy is still the *Impercipient*, as he was to the simpler view of the Christian. To him this "Shining Land" of inner vision is still a mirage-mist. Yet he sees at least the possibility of a new world, in the sense of a better-ordered one.



## CONCLUSION

THE period which opened with Goethe in literature produced a tremendous change in human affairs. Mass production in industry gave birth in the West to great populations who were eager for pleasures but satisfied with poor ones. Their food was, and is, adulterated ; their joys are cheapened and often vulgarised copies of older and simpler delights.

It might have plausibly appeared that these peoples, born of the machine and living by it, would be machinelike in temperament and therefore insensitive and callous.

Yet it is not so at all, for never has there been in all history an age so sensitive to pain as ours. No congregation would listen to a sermon which graphically described the pains of hell, and for the same reason which makes many people refuse to attend a meeting on vivisection : that is, because they could not endure to hear of the horrors over which their ancestors gloated. This change of feeling appears to be almost racial, for children now come into the world with but little of that bias towards cruelty which they showed in the past. And boys stoning wretched and tail-piped dogs are not seen to-day, though they were apparently once common objects of the countryside. Rather does the errand-boy pause to pat the dog and stroke the strolling cat. This gentleness is merely superficial perhaps, for although we are not precisely savage, we yet employ a set of servants to carry out the commands of savages, and cruelty has not been killed but merely driven underground.

Yet this growth of sensitiveness is significant, for in it there may be perceived the first intimation, like the wind that faintly shakes the tree-tops, of a vastly greater transformation than any we have yet passed through, even in this era of change. The meaning of this growth of imaginative

sympathy can be followed, of course, on a far larger and more vivid scale in the great literary artists of the period under review.

These it will be convenient to divide into two classes: first, the creators of character, and second, the poets or seers.

The former have been busy with the task of sorting, sifting and regrouping the essentials of human personality. They have been doing this, of course, ever since the dawn of literature. But seldom has their work been more illuminating than during the period covered roughly by this book. For, while the science of psychology has been opening up new vistas of knowledge, the literary creators of character have been engaged, not merely in enriching with detail the lighted track of mental consciousness in man which we have known so long, but in pushing out into regions of feeling and perception which were only vaguely suspected to exist by earlier writers. Shakespeare explored one such world in *Hamlet*; but he produced no second Prince of the mind.

There is a current phrase of to-day which most aptly catches the spirit of our time. It is "off the deep-end"; and no saying could possibly describe more truly the change which has come over our conception of personality than this one. Psychology has indeed leapt "off the deep-end" in two directions: off both ends of the human spectrum of consciousness, in fact. For it has plunged far into the primitive instincts that we hold in common with the animal; it has leapt forward into that aerial region where man first realises the existence of passions and thoughts which are greater than any he would seem to need for purely earthly and physical existence. The masters of the drama and of the novel have now to reckon, at least in their greater conceptions, with both the subliminal and the supraliminal regions of consciousness. And this fact alone is enough to explain why so much of the more powerful literary work of the latter part of the last century remains, and apparently must remain, caviare to the general. Much of the essential meaning of such dramatists as Ibsen, much of the power of such novelists as Dostoevsky, escapes the average playgoer and the ordinary reader.

When we turn to the poets, to Goethe and Shelley especially, we feel a far more certain foretaste of change, we hear



a deeper note of prophecy, than comes with the new view of character. For the poets are those whose souls feel the wind of destiny and the way it is blowing for the future of human development. The poet is simply a man in whom the guiding Forces which direct humanity make themselves more clearly felt than in the common man. In this sense the whole meaning of *Faust* is that the play is a mirror in which all men may see their possibilities; in which they may learn how vast is the gamut of individual feeling on which each man may play if he will. But Shelley saw even more than Goethe, for he makes his *Prometheus Unbound* a world drama of the rebellion of love against the cruel tyranny, as it would seem, of the Immanent Will. To him, as to Ibsen, the problem of life is just to reconcile the claim of the individual with the joy and delight of the whole mass of creatures to whom life has given birth. To him, as to Hardy, the vast enigma of existence is the blindness of the "bemused knitter" of the web of destiny whom the Greeks called Zeus and the moderns the First Cause.

For if "off the deep-end" is one great phrase of to-day, yet another fine flash of instinct is expressed in the term "the procession of life." It is this very "procession of life" which to-day haunts the minds of men. We feel ourselves part of it, we may even suspect that we are an immortal part of it, although we cannot know whence or whither it moves. Yet we feel coming ever closer and closer the vast hordes of other creatures who—march with us.

This "procession" is, in fact, the kernel of the evolutionary idea which is promising to transform existence for us. This idea, unlike the religions of the past, has but one command, one Categorical Imperative: it is that we must as individuals never hinder, or—were it possible—turn in the wrong direction the great procession of the ages.

From this idea of one great company of beings marching whence and whither we cannot tell there comes inevitably the idea of the unity of all life and being. Every ancient philosophy has affirmed this in some shape or other, but only in these days is the idea coming slowly down from the philosophic heights to the valleys where plain men dwell. It is beginning to creep at last into the hearts of the people. The conception has been affirmed for thousands of years as a religious tenet;

it is a commonplace of political idealism ; it is the guiding principle of science, whether it appears in physics in the form of the matter which is seen ultimately as a whirl of the ether, or in psychology where telepathy begins to face the possibility of a common sea of feeling in which everything can be known in common.

Looking back over the last hundred and fifty years of literary history with this idea of unity in our mind, we can see that the great creators and poets have been carried along on the surface of a tide of tendency, a current which neither they themselves nor their readers could fully realise because they were, both writers and readers, an integral part of it. But now it is perhaps possible for us to stand on the bank of this stream of power and look backwards over the channel that has been cut in history by its on-flow.

And just as we turn back to the Elizabethan age and catch power as the note of that time, or to the eighteenth century and perceive analysis as the special faculty of that time, so we can look back across literary history towards Goethe and see the idea of the evolution of individual personality as leading up to one vast conception of the personality of the whole of Life. From individual personality in its triple form of subliminal instinct, of mental rationality in the daylight, and of supraliminal powers in the unseen region, we are turning towards the great conception of race-personality, or that stream of life which has been expressing itself continuously since the dawn of creation. In Shelley's words, we are beginning to turn from Men to Man ; and so Thomas Hardy visualises in a " transparency " in *The Dynasts* that lobule of the mighty Brain of the Universe which we call Europe ; while Dostoevsky sees in that darkness of the Karamazov family the obscene gulf of generation out of which Life springs, and the Mind and the Body which war together, and must war, till the final consummation when the complete man is at last born, a living and mighty synthesis of Body, Soul and Spirit. And moving outward towards Form, as Dostoevsky moved inward towards Soul, Whitman, Carpenter and their followers try to gather into one expression the whole universe of manifested life. Such men as these are, in Bernard Shaw's phrase, the early iconographers, the first image-makers, of the future religion of

humanity, which will concern itself entirely with the unfolding of the Life Force, or Immanent Will.

But the outward picture-writing of *The Dynasts*, the inward surety of the *Karamazov Brothers*, the syllables of Whitman's Hymn of Creation, are but flashes of intuition ; flashes which light up the darkness. More than this is wanted if ever this great hypothesis of unity is to be brought home to every man. There must be a foundation in thought, in theory. This in England, at any rate, was provided by Samuel Butler's persistent demand that men should "verify their references" in the matter of the theory of the survival of the fittest. In this way, Butler was able to do two things for the new faith : he was able to show Mind, Intelligence, as the thread on which the purposes of the ages had been spun ; a Mind, an Intelligence, that worked little by little, seeing only the next step ; but seeing it surely. Second, Butler gave to man a mental power of attorney by which he might act in full conviction that he himself is Agent-in-Chief on this earth of the Mind of the universe.

Butler, therefore, appears under the title "The Builders" in this book. His fellow-builders are Dostoevsky, Whitman, Carpenter and Thomas Hardy.

It is practically impossible, of course, actually to cut off the "builders" from the earlier section who are called the destroyers, or "wreckers." One can only feel of any one of these men that his work was either predominantly destructive, or constructive. Each one, of course, both built and destroyed, often in one and the same work.

Those men whose importance mainly consists in their destructive work dissolved in the mental world the very foundations on which had been reared that outwardly splendid structure, the society that was built on the principle of universal struggle called the survival of the fittest. They analysed, each man taking some special department, every aspect of the civilisation which had been founded on this law of the jungle. Ibsen traced the sexual law back to its origin in a poisoned spring that was polluting every new birth ; Tolstoi, with his wonderful sense of the flesh, proved that the lusts of hate and desire, of life and death, were but digging, century after century and year after year, one vast grave for the race



of man ; Turgenev, though he had no notion of what he was doing, since he was the artist pure and simple, analysed the quintessence of human nature as it is in an egoistic, self-centred age, and so lit up the blind alley into which mankind was drifting ; Tchekhov opened for us the dark undergrowths of the forest of consciousness in which the mass of the people drift aimlessly to and fro ; Anatole France, most destructive of all the humanists, found nothing that is good for man but his few exquisite moments and nothing in which one can unfeignedly rejoice in human character except the tolerance of M. l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard, who thanked God that he was—as all men are. And what men are, according to Anatole France, is clearly told in that phantasmagoria called *At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque*.

Anatole France's apocalyptic vision of the last man on earth dying alone on a desert planet of cold and hunger is the final *reductio ad absurdum* of the Victorian scheme of things, that schoolmaster's curriculum through which the great Victorians expected humanity to work. It was in view of this Time Table of the Ages that George Eliot prophesied like a melancholy sibyl of duty ; that Tennyson sang in smooth metres of the aeons hence and of all the blessing these were to bring ; that kindly Dickens felt the heart of man becoming ever more and more generous as the lessons were learnt ; in this temper even Thackeray watched his fashionable may-flies circle and waited to hear his good Colonel say *Adsum* ; and Anthony Trollope discussed those weights and measures by which it is the pride of England to guide its business. These men believed in the stability of the house that Jungle Jack had built ; and therefore to them Carlyle croaking on the battlements about the Change he smelt in the wind was but a vulture with a black dyspepsia in his stomach.

There were, however, those who escaped this rule of Law : Emily Brontë because she lived in the still and changeless world where past, present and future are seen as one ; Browning because his vitality, the force of a simple, even primitive man, could see nothing anywhere but the soul working out its divinity, acknowledging its paternity, and doing this either the way of the sun, God's way, or widdershins, in the devil's way, by the Black Mass. Browning saw and could see nothing



anywhere but the spirit making itself manifest. Meredith's case is very different, for he goes a long way with the supporters of the jungle theory of the strong man. To him Nature's plan of choice through universal struggle is the one guiding principle of all existence, mental as well as physical. He would gaily "down" the weak and even becomes uproariously hearty in his approval of the process by which this is done. Then, suddenly we have to bear the shock of seeing him fly away into the empyrean of his own invention, into that Comic world where he sees spirits moving, not like trees, but like men and women. His art, at any rate where his novels are in question, is a flight from reality, from the solemn, striving actuality of his own age. From that eyry of his intellect Meredith sends down those flights of silvery laughter which light up the absurdities of an epoch that had enthroned the Law.

It was, then, the passion of Emily Brontë, and in a lesser degree, of Charlotte; the spirituality of Browning; and the comic genius of Meredith, that gave them the freedom of a wider world than the Victorian time. But neither passion, nor spirituality, nor even genius, can give to anyone the right of entry into a mental world which is not naturally akin to their own spirits. These four writers, great as they are, do not, therefore, belong in essence to the period which is looking forward, more or less consciously, to a new age.

For what the mind of to-day is seeking in practice is to find how to solve the old problem of how to reconcile the individualism of the man, the unit, with the collectivism that looks only to the good of the whole. When this is attained, we shall have reached Ibsen's Third Kingdom. The author of *Little Eyolf* solved the question in the simplest possible manner, for he considered that for a long while each man must go on selfishly working only for his own happiness; when he finds this can but end in disappointment, he will turn towards the good of the whole. This rational, argumentative course is the sole hope which persists behind the sorrow of Hardy's Chorus of the Pities. It is the longing that inspires many political and educational efforts of our time.

But there is another way which presents itself to the minds of poets and mystics; even sometimes to scientists, when these are in prophetic mood: it seems at times that we may be

approaching a change whereby the universal self-consciousness that inspires life to-day may be exchanged for a consciousness that sees the Whole as One. Self-consciousness it is that has built up the form of competitive society which we see everywhere now, and have seen throughout history. A new reaction to life would produce inevitably a new form of society. For centuries we have been, as a race, striving to attain to some perception of unity as a mental fact ; we shall doubtless have to wrestle with the idea as a pure thought for ages yet to come. The supremely important question is, however, whether we shall come to realise, in any numbers, this unity of the whole and to feel it with the same unerring certainty with which we feel conscious of our isolated self. Shall we, in fact, ever come to know what Plato taught, and what Paul saw in a flash of vision ?

This may be called mysticism ; yet, mysticism or no, unless we reckon with this idea it is practically impossible for us to understand fully the more significant literature of the age out of which we are passing. For the great European writers have now been concerned for more than a hundred years with the deep problems of the complete human personality ; that is, with soul, as well as with mind and body.

There are probably many people to-day who have never imagined for a moment what may be the vast consequences of the work of the evolutionary idea, or what may be the adventures that are coming to us who have set out on this long journey. There are, in fact, many who do not at all realise what vast changes in consciousness alone must have been involved in the evolutionary processes of the past. They cannot, therefore, foresee as probable the even vaster changes which may be awaiting the human personality in the future. For most people seem to think that evolution had finished its perfect work—when it made them.

There are others of us who know ourselves to be but mere germs of what men might be ; who see the race itself as but a child. To such men it seems that even now we stand before a Curtain which sways in the wind. One day that Curtain may rise and we shall see, not only a new world in front of us, but a new light falling on the old world out of which we have risen. Both literature and philosophy have been much haunted of

late by the idea of the coming of a Superman. Yet what is a Superman unless he is the man who is conscious that all the resources of the vast reservoir of life are his for the tapping, because all life flows through him? And according to this view, the true Superman is no pinchback figure, no Intractable like Napoleon, but the being who enjoys in full vigour the realisation that all life is his, because all life is one vast whole.

This, at any rate, would seem to be the conclusion towards which some of the great creators of personality have been tending during the period which followed the appearance of the Second Part of *Faust*.





## INDEX

- BALZAC, 50**  
 Le Médecin de Campagne, 50  
 Louis Lambert, 54  
 Séraphita, 55  
 César Birotteau, 56  
 La Cousine Bette, 56  
 The Atheist's Mass, 60  
 La Peau de Chagrin, 61  
 La Recherche de l'Absolu, 61  
 Le Lys dans la Vallée, 61
- BRONTË, CHARLOTTE AND EMILY, 157**  
 Jane Eyre, 157, 164  
 Shirley, 157, 158, 162, 164  
 Wuthering Heights, 160, 161, 167  
 The Visionary, 161
- BROWNING, 169**  
 Any Wife to Any Husband, 170  
 Sludge the Medium, 171, 172  
 The Ring and the Book, 171, 172, 176  
 Caliban, 171  
 The Return of the Druses, 171  
 The Statue and the Bust, 175  
 Childe Harold to the Dark Tower  
 Came, 177  
 The Englishman in Italy, 180  
 Fra Lippo Lippi, 181  
 Paracelsus, 181, 182  
 La Saisiaz, 182
- BUTLER, SAMUEL, 277**  
 Life and Habit, 279, 282, 284  
 The Way of All Flesh, 283, 290, 291, 292, 293  
 The Fair Haven, 284  
 Life of Dr. Butler, 292  
 Family Prayers, 292
- CARLYLE, 79**  
 The French Revolution, 83, 88  
 Frederick the Great, 88
- CARPENTER, 315**  
 Towards Democracy, 317, 318, 327, 329  
 The Triumph of Civilisation, 328
- DICKENS, 128**  
 Hard Times, 130  
 Edwin Drood, 130  
 The Old Curiosity Shop, 131  
 Bleak House, 133, 134  
 Household Words, 133  
 Pickwick, 133  
 Dombey and Son, 137  
 David Copperfield, 137  
 Oliver Twist, 137
- DOSTOEVSKY, 294**  
 The Possessed, 296, 297, 299, 304, 307  
 Insulted and Injured, 296, 301  
 Crime and Punishment, 298, 304  
 The Idiot, 298, 300, 308, 313  
 Letters from the Underworld, 299  
 The Karamazov Brothers, 311, 313
- ELIOT, GEORGE, 93**  
 Adam Bede, 95  
 Westminster Review, 95
- FRANCE, ANATOLE, 258**  
 Thais, 258, 269  
 Life of Joan of Arc, 258, 270  
 Penguin Island, 258, 270  
 The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard, 258, 269

FRANCE, ANATOLE—*continued*

- At the Sign of the Reine Pédaque, 258, 261, 263, 271, 272
- The Garden of Epicurus, 258, 259, 266
- The Gods are Athirst, 258, 261
- The Procurator of Judea, 258, 268
- The Red Lily, 258, 259
- Histoire Comique, 261
- The Fall of the Angels, 261
- The Elm Tree on the Mall, 263, 270
- Crainquebille, 270

## GOETHE, 33

- Faust, 34, 36, 37, 39, 44, 46, 48
- Iphigenia, 35, 42
- Werther, 42
- Götz von Berlichingen, 42
- Elective Affinities, 46

## HARDY, THOMAS, 331

- The Impercipient, 332, 351
- The Return of the Native, 336, 340, 341, 345
- Two on a Tower, 336
- The Mayor of Casterbridge, 340, 341
- The Woodlanders, 341, 345
- Jude the Obscure, 344
- Far From the Madding Crowd, 345
- Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 345
- The Dynasts, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349
- The Darkling Thrush, 347

## IBSEN, 201

- Brand, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 213
- Peer Gynt, 204, 205, 206
- The Wild Duck, 205
- Little Eyolf, 205, 209
- The Master Builder, 205, 209
- The Enemy of the People, 206
- The Doll's House, 205, 207, 210
- Ghosts, 207, 210
- Emperor and Galilean, 209
- John Gabriel Borkman, 209
- Love's Comedy, 211

## MEREDITH, 184

- Juggling Jerry, 185, 194
- The Day of the Daughter of Hades, 185, 194
- The Egoist, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192

MEREDITH—*continued*

- Diana of the Crossways, 189
- The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, 189, 192
- Hymn to Colour, 196
- Woods of Westernmain, 196
- Shaving of Shagpat, 196

## SHELLEY, 62

- Address to the Irish People, 64, 70
- Julian and Maddalo, 70
- Prometheus Unbound, 71, 76
- Ariel, by M. Maurois, 69

## TCHEHOV, 248

- Uncle Vanya, 248
- The Three Sisters, 248, 249
- The Cherry Orchard, 249, 250
- The Darling, 252, 254, 256
- Ward Number Six, 252
- Mire, 253, 256
- The Black Monk, 254
- The Dreary Story, 255
- The Duel, 255
- The Seagull, 256

## TENNYSON, 141

- Northern Cobbler, 141
- Rizpah, 141
- Ulysses, 141
- Enoch Arden, 144
- Locksley Hall, 146
- Maud, 146
- Idylls of the King, 146, 152, 153
- In Memoriam, 149, 150
- Holy Grail, 152

## THACKERAY, 103

- Vanity Fair, 104
- Esmond, 109

## TOLSTOI, 216

- War and Peace, 218, 220, 222
- Anna Karenina, 218, 220
- Resurrection, 218, 219, 221
- The Powers of Darkness, 218
- The Kreutzer Sonata, 219
- The Cossacks, 219
- The First Step, 224
- Cruel Pleasures, 224
- The Light Shineth in Darkness, 226
- The Fruits of Culture, 228

## TROLLOPE, 117

Autobiography, 117, 118

The Warden, 122

The Last Chronicle of Barset, 123

## TURGENEV, 233

Sportsman's Sketches, 233, 235,  
246

Biryuk the Wolf, 234

Byezhin Prairie, 235

House of Gentlefolk, 235, 244

Fathers and Children, 238, 241

On the Eve, 244

TURGENEV—*continued*

Torrents of Spring, 245

A Living Relic, 247

Virgin Soil, 247

## WHITMAN, WALT, 315

Leaves of Grass, 318, 326, 329

Democratic Vistas, 319

Salut au Monde! 322

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard

Bloomed, 325

A Hand Mirror, 325

To Him That Was Crucified, 325



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